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**Week 1: Ultimate Questions****Text Reading: Genesis 3 – 11 Overview**

*“Nondum considerasti, quanti ponderis sit peccatum. “*

*You have not yet considered, the great burden of sin.”*  
(Anselm of Canterbury)

In a recent presentation it was declared somewhat emphatically that “there is no philosophy in the Bible.” The speaker repeated the statement twice in short order, without providing much in the way of context to the claim. Without a framework within which to measure the statement, one has to consider what might be meant thereby. For instance, if the speaker was simply saying that the Bible is not a philosophy textbook – in the same sense that it is not a scientific treatise or an economics manual – we may readily agree. Indeed, the Apostle Paul himself was quite suspect of ‘vain philosophy’ and cautioned against its inroads into the early Church. However, the manner in which this definitive statement was made argues another explanation: one of prejudice or bias against the Scripture as representative of wisdom literature among the writings of human history. After all, the word ‘philosophy’ literally means ‘the love of wisdom.’

There is a prejudice against the Bible within Western academia; one would be naïve to contend otherwise. The holy book of Judaism and Christianity may be studied as a historical treatise or a literary compendium, but generally within scholarly circles ‘all due respect’ for the Scriptures ends there. This is manifested by unsubstantiated and de-contextualized statements such as the one above: comprehensive denials to the Bible of any validity within the various spheres of academic study. Thus, since the Bible is not a science textbook, there is no science in the Bible. As the Bible does not purport to be a philosophical treatise, there is no philosophy in the Bible. And so on and so forth across the spectrum of the major branches of modern academic curricula. Long gone are the days

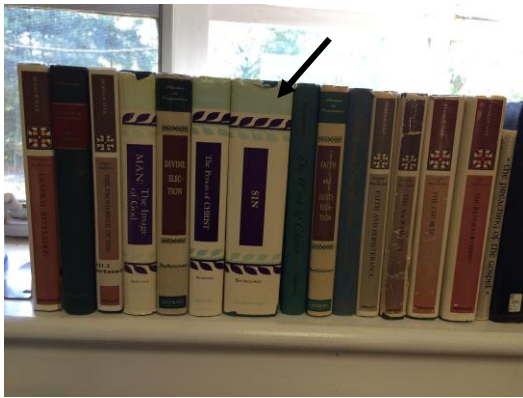
when Theology was considered the Queen of the Sciences; in the modern world it is not even a lady-in-waiting.

Such reasoning is patently illogical: the syllogisms above relating the Bible to science or philosophy or economics are all *non sequiturs*. One may find philosophy in poetry, and economics in a novel (some have argued that the *Wizard of Oz* was intended by Frank Baum as a treatise on the gold standard, though that has been hotly debated by people who hotly debate such things). Furthermore, the contention that the Bible holds no validity in modern academic study tends to be maintained by those who are not themselves firmly convinced of this 'fact.' More broadly speaking, at least with respect to 'philosophy' in the Bible, the general opinion of predominantly atheistic academics is one of mild respect for the biblical presentation of its unique worldview. An example of this, and one of sublime irony, is the fact that the apostle who ardently warned the Colossians to beware of "*philosophy and empty deceit*" is regularly listed among the greatest philosophers of all time. A recent list places the Apostle Paul third in the top ten, behind Plato and Aristotle. There is indeed a fairly widespread acknowledgement that the writings of Paul, of Augustine and Aquinas, of Jonathan Edwards, all contain the broad outlines and characteristics of philosophy. To this list, with this current study, we add the name of Moses.

When it comes to Moses, chapters 3 through 11 of Genesis usually get short shrift - actually the whole book of Genesis tends to take a back seat, with the exception of the Creation narrative, to the books of the Law. Granted that what Moses has to say about the world outside of Abraham and his descendants occupies only eight chapters (Genesis 4 - 11), nonetheless these chapters constitute one of the most profound and philosophical treatises on the rise and progress of sin in the entire corpus of human literature. Other ancient philosophies and religions deal with the reality of sin, though none so thoroughly nor so straightforwardly as Scripture. And none offer anything as profound as the biblical account of the Fall of Man and the Rise of Nations.

The doctrine of the Fall and sin are exclusively biblical ideas; or at least they are only fully conceived and applied in the biblical scheme of religious thought. These doctrines are solvents, not sources of difficulty. Into the problem of evil, Scripture introduces elements of explanation.<sup>1</sup>

That last phrase, "...Scripture introduces elements of explanation," could be the guiding theme of our current study. For when the question is the origin of evil, there are no definitive answers; indeed, one may argue that there are no *real*



answers at all. G. C. Berkouwer discusses this aspect of the question of evil in his volume *Sin*, in his excellent 14-volume *Studies in Dogmatics*. Indeed, Berkouwer discusses a great deal in this volume: notice in the adjacent photo the relative thickness of

*Sin* compared to the other thirteen volumes! Chapter Five of *Sin* is titled "The Riddle of Sin." But Berkouwer has alluded to the difficulty earlier, in the first chapter, "The Question of Origin." Here Berkouwer agrees with Herman Bavinck's postulate that one cannot speak of an 'origin' of sin, but only a 'beginning.' Berkouwer comments concerning the question of origin, "This question is illegitimate for the simple reason that a logical explanation assigns a sensibleness to that which is intrinsically nonsensical, a rationality to that which is irrational, and a certain order to that which is disorderly."<sup>2</sup>

This comment is in keeping with what we find in Genesis and throughout the Scripture, where there is no attempt to explain the *origin* of evil, only its beginning within the human race and, consequently, the world. Countless theories have developed over how sin could germinate and grow within the heart and mind of a sinless being, Adam, to the point that many theologians (especially of the post-Enlightenment variety) have denied Adam's created

<sup>1</sup> Laidlaw, John *The Bible Doctrine of Man* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark; 1895); 200.

<sup>2</sup> Berkouwer, G. C. *Sin: Studies in Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans; 1971); 18.

perfection. Others have made the 'fall' into a 'rise,' and have postulated that Man became even greater through sinning than he was as originally created. There is some truth to this, and these chapters of Genesis describe to us just what it cost Man to become 'great.' But evil *per se* is never given an origin, and the transition of Man from sinless to sinner is never portrayed as anything but a 'Fall.' This in itself is profound philosophy, that recognizes sin not as a 'thing-in-itself,' but rather as a corruption, a derogation of that which is, and a massive step backward in the true development of the human creature.

In addition to this aspect of the study of sin and evil, Berkouwer also points out that the topic of sin cannot be studied dispassionately. This is because the student is himself a sinner, and the world around him and in which he is daily involved, is out of sorts because of sin. "No real genius is needed to see life's battered and mangled pieces before us, and no particular wisdom is required to appreciate how profoundly abnormal life can be."<sup>3</sup> So the student who investigates the rise and spread of sin in man and in the world, does so not as an objective medical clinician, but as a carrier of the disease itself.

The question of sin's origin has a qualitatively different character from the question of any other kind of origin...Whoever reflects on the origin of sin cannot engage himself in a merely theoretical dispute: rather he is engaged, intimately and personally, in what can only be called the *problem of sin's guilt*.<sup>4</sup>

Not only is the investigation of sin an intensely personal one, it is unavoidable for any philosophical analysis of human society, on the individual as well as on the societal level. It is not only the introspective man who has to come to terms with sin - though the issue is far more serious for this sort - it is every man who lives consciously in a world gone wrong, aware of the 'abnormality' as Berkouwer puts it, but in the dark as to what 'normal' should be. "Herman Bavinck has written that the origin of evil is second only to the

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*; 11.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*; 14, italics original.

origin of being as the greatest enigma in man's life; moreover, it is certainly the hardest cross for man's understanding to bear."<sup>5</sup>

Into this morass the Bible "introduces elements of explanation." The outlines of the biblical narrative are familiar to the most elementary of students of the Bible. Indeed, the cast of characters and the stage itself are found in various forms in the ancient cosmologies of many different, non-Hebrew cultures. The central motif of the *tree* and of the *Man* and the *Woman*, and indeed even of the *Serpent*, are frequently discovered in the creation myths of ancient Babylonia, Sumeria, China, and even North American Indian traditions. A common feature of many of these myths is an instruction or prohibition given to the first parents by the creator god, the disobedience of the first pair to that injunction, and the ensuing calamity brought upon the whole earth.<sup>6</sup> The most common feature, however, is the presence of a flood narrative in so many ancient mythologies. When one surveys the extra-biblical accounts of the Flood, however, it becomes apparent just how pervasive has been and is the application of Anselm's maxim, "*You have not yet considered, the great burden of sin.*"

As an example, we have the Atrahasis Epic of the ancient Akkadians. In this saga, mankind is created in order to relieve the gods of their toil. But the proliferation of man upon the earth causes loss of sleep to the gods, due to the increasing noise of the human creature. Thus one of the lesser gods decides to eradicate the human race through a catastrophic flood.

...the creation of man as intended to relieve the (lesser) deities of their toil, and the attempted destruction of humanity as divine response to the noise of the expanding human population which threatened the very rest that their creation had sought to provide for the gods. This destruction, decreed by Enlil, took several successive forms, culminating in the Deluge but, as in other flood-stories, its purpose was frustrated by the survival of the flood-hero, here called Atra-

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*; 13.

<sup>6</sup> [http://dept.cs.williams.edu/~lindsey/myths/myths\\_9.html](http://dept.cs.williams.edu/~lindsey/myths/myths_9.html) accessed October 12, 2015.

hasis (“exceeding wise”), through the intervention of Ea, the divine friend of humanity.<sup>7</sup>

More famous than the Atrahasis Epic is the Epic of Gilgamesh, written *circa* 2,000 BC and discovered by archaeologists investigating the ancient Assyrians ruins of Ninevah. This ancient epic combines the ‘mighty hunter’ of Nimrod-like skill (*cp.* Gen. 10:8-9) with the supremely righteous ‘Noah’ character who survives the Great Deluge. A third character, Enkidu, is another mighty hunter created by the gods to destroy Gilgamesh. The story is somewhat convoluted, but it involves seduction (in this case not by a serpent, but by a seductress - incorporating the role of woman into the narrative) and the loss of physical strength. It is interesting to notice the quest and attainment of ‘godlikeness’ similar in the ancient Sumerian epic to the narrative of Genesis.

When he was sated with her charms,  
 He set his face towards the open country of his cattle.  
 The gazelles saw Enkidu and scattered,  
 The cattle of open country kept away from his body.  
 For Enkidu had stripped; his body was too clean.  
 His legs, which used to keep pace with his cattle, were at a standstill.  
 Enkidu had been diminished, he could not run as before.  
 Yet he had acquired judgment, had become wiser.  
 He turned back, he sat at the harlot’s feet.  
 The harlot was looking at his expression,  
 And he listened attentively to what the harlot said.  
 The harlot spoke to him, to Enkidu,  
 “*You have become wise Enkidu, you have become like a god.*”<sup>8</sup>

Yet for all of the similarities between ancient cosmogonies and the biblical account of the Fall of Man, there are far more dissimilarities. Indeed, the advent of sin in the world is rarely treated with even as much specificity as quoted above from the Gilgamesh Epic; often some form of evolution intrudes into the

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2013/10/31/A-Theology-Of-The-Fall-In-Genesis-3-And-The-Ancient-Near-East.aspx#Article> accessed October 12, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.piney.com/Enki.html> accessed October 12, 2015; italics added.



myth, or more generally Man is already evil. Far more common among the ancient writings is the narrative of a Great Flood at some point in mankind's early history. Anthropologist Arthur Custance notes one researcher's conclusion, "Among all the traditions which concern the history of primitive humanity, the most universal is that of the Deluge. It would be going too far to



Werner Keller (1909-80)

assert that this tradition is found among all nations, but it does re-appear among all the great races of men..."<sup>9</sup> Werner Keller, in his *The Bible as History*, claims "There are 80,000 works in seventy-two languages about the Flood, of which 70,000 mention the legendary wreckage of the Ark."<sup>10</sup> So prevalent is the tradition of a Great Flood, that

the higher critics of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century simply concluded that the biblical account was borrowed from one or more of the other traditions of the Ancient Near East. A more reasonable conclusion, based on the differences as well as the similarities between the many Deluge epics, is that the multitude derived from a common ancestral tradition, with varying degrees of corruption as the narrative passed from generation to generation. It was common for biblical apologists to assert the 'straightforwardness' and 'un-mythological prose' of the Genesis record as clear indications of it being the true historical account of an event acknowledged as historical by all ancient cultures. But there is much even in the biblical account that will trouble the modern liberal mind, and even among professing believers the 'Rise and Progress of Sin' in Genesis chapters 3 through 11 is pronounced as myth and legend.

Thus we return to that brief comment by John Laidlaw, that into this morass the Bible "introduces elements of explanation." The narrative is internally consistent, and several introductory comments may be made in regard to the overall perspective of the biblical view of sin and its spread. **First**, it is

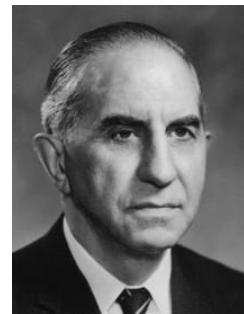
<sup>9</sup> Custance, Arthur *The Flood: Local or Global?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan; 1979); 84.

<sup>10</sup> Keller, Werner *The Bible as History* (New York: William Morrow & Company; 1956); 40.

clear that the advent of sin is not from God. Similar to the ancient legends and epics, there is a 'god' involved – Satan, the serpent or snake who beguiles the first woman into eating of the forbidden fruit. But the Genesis narrative itself begins by placing this powerful and subtle being in proper perspective: he is himself *a creature*. “Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made.”<sup>11</sup> It is implied here that the serpent himself is to be numbered among the ‘beasts that the Lord God had made,’ and this viewpoint is confirmed later in the chapter when the Lord God pronounces judgment upon the serpent for his role in the Fall of Man. In all of this, however, God remains holy, untouched Himself by sin and incapable of association with the sin of Adam.

The **second** overarching principle that derives from the first, is that the Fall of Man was an act of man’s free and un-coerced will. While the temptation from the serpent was powerful and seductive, the sin of man arose not from without but from within. John Murray writes, “The sin of Adam was a movement of defection and apostasy and transgression in Adam’s heart and mind and will, and for that movement he

was responsible and he alone was the agent and subject. The temptation of Satan did not constitute the sin of Adam.”<sup>12</sup> John Laidlaw adds, “It [i.e., sin] arose with an external suggestion; but it was an inward crisis. The motives most efficient in bringing it about were ambitious desire of a short road to divine knowledge, and doubt of the divine love.”<sup>13</sup> Of course, the assignment of responsibility most properly to the



John Murray (1898-1975)

first man raises an insuperable question as to *how* Adam came to sin if he was created ‘very good’ and ‘in the image of God.’ It is a question that the Bible does not answer. But this non-answer is perhaps the most profound feature of the

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<sup>11</sup> Genesis 3:1

<sup>12</sup> Murray, John *The Collected Writings of John Murray: Volume 2* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth; 1977); 69.

<sup>13</sup> Laidlaw; 208.

biblical account, and certainly the one that differentiates it most strikingly from all other ancient epics and legends.

Thus the **third** characteristic of the Genesis narrative is that the sin of man was a *fall*. It was not a movement from childlike innocence toward mature knowledge, it was a catastrophic movement from a perfect (though not yet complete) being into one that was corrupt; the 'how' of it all being left as one of the great theological and philosophical enigmas of all time. It is an undeniable mystery that a creature formed both by the hand of God and in His image, could from that created perfection derive the will and motive to sin; yet that is exactly what the Genesis narrative – and indeed the balance of Scripture as well – introduces as 'elements of explanation.' Laidlaw writes,

It is usual to say that the Bible does not solve the problem of the origin of evil, but profound thinkers find that insolubility belongs to the essence of the question. It lies in the idea of evil to be an utterly inexplicable thing. The attempt to explain or account for it assumes its rationality, or some other element of rightness in that which is essentially wrong.<sup>14</sup>

Laidlaw then quotes the classic passage from Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, "Who asks the efficient cause of an evil will? There is no efficient in the case, only a deficient. Who would ask to see darkness, or to hear silence, let him ask the reason of the unreasonable, that is, of sin."<sup>15</sup>

There are practical conclusions that flow from the biblical perspective of Man originally in a state of sinlessness – having been created good and thus without any indwelling sin or even tendency thereto – that permeate the Genesis account of the Rise and Progress of Sin. One of these is frequently shared in the ancient traditions, though never with the clear explanation as provided by Scripture: the original glory of Man, a 'Golden Age' at the beginning of human history from which mankind fell disgraced. Thus we do not witness Adam and

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<sup>14</sup> Laidlaw; 209.

<sup>15</sup> *Idem*.

his immediate progeny degenerating quickly into barbarity or bestiality. Rather there are still 'great ones' on the earth in the generations following the first Man, doing mighty deeds and developing and spreading prosperous and powerful civilizations. Even at the end of the narrative Man is a noble creature, an intellectual and inventive creature, who strives mightily to ascend by his own collective power to the very seat of God. The divine testimony runs thus, "*Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them.*"<sup>16</sup>

Thus the biblical narrative presents an unvarnished account of Man's apostasy from his original state, while at no time diminishing the innate dignity of Man as created in the image of God. This ontological condition of Man does not change with the Fall, and is reiterated with regard to the penalty associated with murder, after the Flood. Indeed, the biblical narrative sets forth the important theological and philosophical principles that if Man were not highly exalted among the creatures from God's hand, his apostasy would not have constituted so grievous a Fall; and if Man did not retain the inherent dignity of the *Imago Dei* after the Fall, he would consequently cease to bear the heavy burden of sin. The subsequent history of mankind, not least that which is recorded in Genesis chapters 4 through 11, constitutes a running commentary on these two facts concerning the human condition vis-à-vis God. Laidlaw again waxes eloquent,

The Bible account of the Fall and sin, instead of vilifying human nature, implies the highest view of man and his constitution...The music of man's life is not longer in harmony with the divine order and glory to which it was set.<sup>17</sup>

There are so many points of contact between the Genesis account of the Fall, and of the subsequent and consequent 'Rise and Progress of Sin' within

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<sup>16</sup> Genesis 11:6

<sup>17</sup> Laidlaw; 210.

human society, that no introductory comments such as these can be adequate. But perhaps we also introduce 'elements of explanation' as a precursor to a more in depth study of the passages themselves.

One of the most profound of these 'elements' to be found in the Genesis narrative of sin's progress within the human race, is summarized inimitably by a phrase from *Cur Deus Homo* - 'Why God became Man' - written by the 11<sup>th</sup> Century Archbishop of Canterbury, Anselm. At the beginning of Chapter XXI of Book 2 of the treatise, Anselm and his associate, Boso, are discussing whether an act or thought of repentance on the part of a sinner is sufficient to blot out that sin. Boso considers it adequate, to which comment Anselm replies, "*You have not yet considered the great burden of sin.*" The Latin original of this phrase is worth reviewing, and as many of the words are roots of similar English words, it is also not too difficult to follow for non-Latin readers.

*Nondum considerasti, quanti ponderis sit peccatum.*

The verb *considerasti* is, clearly enough, 'consider,' in the sense of giving adequate attention and thought to something - something that Boso has not yet done with regard to *peccatum*, 'sin.' The words that captivate the heart of Anselm's teaching, and of the biblical philosophy of sin in contrast to all other human attempts to either explain sin or to explain it away, are in the middle: *quanti ponderis*. The first word is somewhat of an economic term, meaning 'how much' as in 'at what price' is something valued or sold. The English word 'quantity' derives from the same Latin root, so we can see that Anselm is challenging Boso as to whether he has adequately considered the immense cost of sin, the price that Man paid for the liberty he gained.

The second word, *ponderis*, naturally reminds us of the English word 'ponderous' as in 'very heavy.' The thought here is of a massive burden, an awesome weight the measure of which Boso - and the entirety of mankind's self-directed accounts of sin - has failed to grasp or even 'consider.' This is where the

Genesis account of the Fall of Man and the Rise & Progress of Sin in the world steps into the theological and philosophical void. The fundamental theme of chapters 3 through 11 of the first book of the Bible is, without a doubt, the *incredible burden of sin* upon all of God's once-good creation and supremely upon the crown jewel of that creation, Man.

The Word of God sees sin as something radical and total, and regards it as a missing of the mark, apostasy, transgression, lovelessness, lawlessness, and an alienation from the life of God. In short, it sees man's sin as a denigration of God's glory...Any attempt to minimize our sin is radically opposed by the whole of the scriptural message.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, any attempt to minimize the *quanti ponderis* of sin must result in a proportionate diminution of the glory of God's grace, a reality that runs parallel to the Rise & Progress of Sin in the Genesis narrative. The 'great weight' of sin is to be measured against the twin poles of the primal glory of Man as the Image of God, which is corrupted by the Fall; and the eternal glory of God, which remains untouched by Man's sin. Any lesser standards with regard to sin will be woefully inadequate to the reality of mankind's own self-conscious witness and to the witness of human history. Thus the account of the Fall of Man and the Rise & Progress of Sin, recorded in Genesis chapters 3 through 11, constitutes *true philosophy*, for it is the *Truth*.

With man's stepping out of the simplicity of obedience to God, and with the knowledge obtained by disobedience, a movement began in which man pictures himself as growing more and more powerful, more and more titanic...But this evolution and slow rise to cultural greatness is accompanied by an ever-growing estrangement of man from God that was bound to lead to a catastrophe.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Berkouwer, *Sin*; 285, 287.

<sup>19</sup> von Rad, Gerhard, *Old Testament Theology: Volume 1* (New York: Harper & Row; 1957); 160.

**Week 2:            Insatiable Appetite****Text Reading:     Genesis 3:1 - 12**

*“In the human being heaven and earth touch one another.  
In the human being God enters into his creation.”*  
(Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger)

So much ink has been spilled regarding the question of how Man was capable of sinning, that Adam’s original state is often misunderstood or reinterpreted in ways contrary to the biblical record. However, taking Genesis chapter 3 as an intended and natural sequence to the first two chapters of the book, we may appropriate and paraphrase the opening comments from Charles Dickens short story, *A Christmas Carol*, “There is no doubt that Man was created very good. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am going to relate.” Unless one recognizes and accepts the goodness of Adam as created, the narrative of the Fall in Genesis 3 and the subsequent (and consequent) record of Man’s progress in both civilization and sin, must of necessity be twisted and reinterpreted in manifold different ways in an attempt to make sense out of the story. Sadly that is what has happened through the era of higher criticism from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and the view prevails throughout liberal Christianity that Man was somehow prone to sin even as created.



**Wellhausen (1844-1918)**

This tendency to disassociate the various parts of the Genesis record was given a dramatic shot in the arm through the ‘Documentary Hypothesis’ of the German higher critic, Julius Wellhausen. Wellhausen believed that he could discern at least four different authors within the Pentateuch – none of them, of course, being Moses – either from the different names that were used for God

or from what he perceived to be the ‘perspective’ of the writer of this or that section. For instance, if the author used *Elohim* as the name of God, that section of the text belonged to ‘E’ – Elohist; if *Yahweh*, then the writer was ‘J’ – Jahvist. Add the priestly author or authors – P, and the team of Jewish scholars who compiled and edited the various parts into a whole, the Deuteronomist – D, and you have the JEPD or Documentary Hypothesis. Wellhausen’s theory has been almost entirely adopted in the modern evangelical church, although there is no substantive evidence in any body of writing that the change of a character’s name indicates a different author, or within the Pentateuch itself that so many scholars participated in the final assemblage that for millennia was considered the work of Moses. It

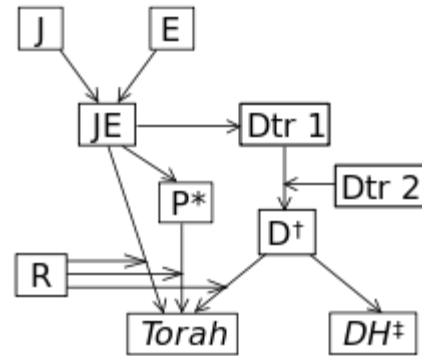


Diagram of the Documentary Hypothesis.

- \* includes most of Leviticus
- † includes most of Deuteronomy
- ‡ "*Deuteronomic history*": Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings<sup>20</sup>

is the measure of modern evangelical scholarship to accept the basic principles of the Documentary Hypothesis (viewed no longer as a ‘hypothesis’ but irrefutable fact) even though the mechanics of the compilation are rarely believed to be that which Wellhausen dreamed up.

Considering, as a biblical student must, the attitude of the rest of the Bible in regard to the historical continuity and theological unity of the Pentateuch, adoption of the Wellhausen Theory invariably means rejection of any meaningful view of divine inspiration and authority of the Scriptures. Any diminution of the structural and historical integrity of the Genesis record undermines the foundation of both Jewish and Christian anthropology, theology, and soteriology. As a most obvious example, he who would remove the narrative of the Fall from the realm of historical reality must also excise Romans chapter 5

<sup>20</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Documentary\\_hypothesis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Documentary_hypothesis)



from the theology of Christianity. Thus we have given the pervasive and corrosive Documentary Hypothesis all the space, and more, that it deserves.

What is of greater concern to an evangelical study of Genesis chapter 3 is the question of Adam's pre-Fall nature: was Man created upright as we are told by Qohelet,<sup>21</sup> or did Adam possess 'concupiscence' – the tendency or ability to sin? Was Adam's good nature as created an essential characteristic of his being, or was it a *donum superadditum* – an added gift that he could lose through disobedience without affecting the underlying core of his being? A detailed discussion of these questions belongs to the systematic theological study "Man and Sin," which of necessity draws a tremendous amount from the first chapters



**Andrew Fuller (1754-1815)**

of Genesis. When one simply reads the text, however, it is clear that *the Creator's* opinion of the works of His hands was that, after the creation of Man, all was "*very good.*" 18<sup>th</sup> Century Baptist Andrew Fuller sets the proper stage for the narrative in Genesis chapter 3, "We have hitherto seen man as God created him, upright and happy. But here we behold a sad reverse; the introduction of moral evil into our world, the source of all our misery." Without doubt this assessment of Adam's nature raises perhaps unanswerable questions in regard to the sequel: *how* did a perfect being sin? *What* was there within Adam's mind and soul that succumbed to the temptation of the serpent and germinated that primal rebellion? And of course the classic counterfactual 'what if' of all time: *What* would have been the condition of man and the world had Adam stood firm and not sinned?

Prickly questions notwithstanding, it is unfair to the biblical record that we purport to study and believe, not to accept the nature of Man as we are given it from Genesis chapters 1 and 2. Furthermore, the subsequent chapters continue

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<sup>21</sup> Ecclesiastes 7:29

to show Man as a remarkable being, far from the common modern view of an infantile semi-primate just rising from the evolutionary swamp of his birth. No, we must agree with Luther that there was nothing within Adam that predisposed him to sin; nothing in his mind or soul that made his fall inevitable, much less advantageous. “His will was good and his reason sound, so that he understood, believed, and willed what God willed and commanded.”<sup>22</sup> Any attempt to mitigate this biblical truth will undermine and ultimately destroy the entire salvific message of the Bible...indeed, “nothing wonderful can come from the story” the Book of Genesis, and then the whole of Scripture, continues to relate.



**Martin Luther (1483-1546)**

*“Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’”* (3:1)

The narrative of the Fall starts without apology with a talking snake, for that is the universally agreed upon translation of the Hebrew word rendered ‘serpent’ above. This facet of the story has, of course, led liberal scholars to the summary conclusion that the entire story is a myth, having no actual contact with either history or reality. But this conclusion assumes one of two things that cannot be proven, and that are themselves impossible to prove *impossible*. The first option is that animals once communicated with Man. This phenomenon is so common within human literature – from ancient mythology to C. S. Lewis’ *Chronicles of Narnia* – that it just as reasonable to assume an even more ancient oral tradition of the reality of talking animals, as it is to reject the notion out of hand. The second option is that the snake was co-opted by a more powerful spirit, that of the Devil, or Satan.

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<sup>22</sup> Luther, Martin *Luther’s Commentary on Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan; 1958); 63.

In favor of the second option is the fact that the temptation of Adam and Eve<sup>23</sup> was later attributed to Satan by the testimony of subsequent Scripture. It is widely believed that this is the event to which Jesus is referring when he denominated Satan as the 'Father of lies.'

*You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.*  
(John 8:44)

And the serpent is specifically linked with the devil by the Apostle John in the Revelation,

*And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.*  
(Revelation 12:9)

Furthermore, we have at least one famous example in Scripture of a talking animal, in this case one energized not by the prince of demons, but by Jehovah himself. This is the somewhat humorous story of Balaam and his donkey; and it is interesting that the false prophet failed to exhibit any shock at the event, similar to Eve's lack of consternation when the serpent spoke to her in the Garden.

*When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, she lay down under Balaam; so Balaam was angry and struck the donkey with his stick. And the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?" Then Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you have made a mockery of me! If there had been a sword in my hand, I would have killed you by now." The donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your donkey on which you have ridden all your life to this day? Have I ever been accustomed to do so to you?" And he said, "No."*

(Numbers 22:27-30)

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<sup>23</sup> The use of the name 'Eve' this early in Genesis 3 is admittedly anachronistic, as the Woman was not named 'Eve' until the end of the chapter. But this is her name as it has come down to us, and it seems unduly pedantic to avoid using it with reference to the Woman throughout the narrative.

Yet this fact that Balaam did not seem alarmed by his donkey's verbal riposte may also indicate what was mentioned earlier: an earlier tradition of animals actually being able to communicate with Man. This option would explain Eve's calm reaction to a talking snake, and might itself be explained by the enigmatic phenomenon of Adam 'naming' the animals from Genesis 2. But there is no biblical evidence to support a doctrine of primal talking animals, though it has provided for quite entertaining fiction. In any event, there was no reason for Eve to be alarmed by a talking animal, for prior to the advent of sin into God's good creation, there was no danger present in even such a strange anomaly. "The woman did not flee from converse with the serpent, because hitherto no dissention had existed; she, therefore, accounted it simply as a domestic animal."<sup>24</sup> In the end, we are left with two undeniable facts of the case from the biblical record: that the motive force behind the serpent's words and will was Satan, and that Eve showed no undue alarm at the fact that a snake was talking to her.

The description of the serpent as 'subtle' or 'crafty' is, in the Hebrew, a poetic play on words from the previous verse, the last of the second chapter. There man is described as 'naked,' the Hebrew word *'arumim*, though this condition causes man no discomfort at all. In verse 1 of Chapter 3, the serpent is described as 'subtle,' the Hebrew word *'arum*, clearly associated with the former term in 2:25. However, like many Hebraic plays on words to be found in the Old Testament, it is not readily apparent what the connection is between the nakedness of man and the subtlety of the snake is. Possibly what is being indicated here is the fact that Man is innocent, without guile; whereas the serpent is full of guile and intends to ensnare Man in a web of treachery and deception. In any event, it is certainly not without significance that the first thing that comes to the awareness of fallen Man is the fact of his own 'nakedness,' of which he is then ashamed.

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<sup>24</sup> Calvin, John *Calvin's Commentaries: Volume 1* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House; 1996); 146.

The methodology of the serpent's temptation to Eve is a masterpiece of deception, of misdirection and seduction directed at the member of the primal pair who apparently *did not* receive the divine prohibition directly from Jehovah. It remains to be discussed where exactly Eve's husband was during her interview with the snake (it has been the general practice of the female of the human specie to immediately draw the male into any contact with this creature). But for the narrative's purpose the dialogue is entirely between the snake and the Woman. The têt-a-têt begins with a bold and sweeping statement by the snake concerning what he had apparently heard concerning the divine limitation with regard to the 'trees of the garden,'

*Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?*

This is a blatant misstatement of what God did say in regard to what Adam and Eve could and could not eat, and with this statement the serpent allows Eve to seemingly gain the upper hand in their verbal duel. God did not forbid the eating of 'all' - and the word could also be rendered 'every' - tree of the garden; He merely prohibited the fruit of *one* tree, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. To see the subtlety of the serpent's opening line, however, it is perhaps best to translate the 'all' of the New American Standard version as 'every,' which the Hebrew word (*kol*) will permit: "*Has God indeed prohibited every tree of the garden from you?*" The attack is made upon the goodness of God, and finds entry into the woman's (and the man's) heart through the spectre of discontent. It is as if the serpent asks the woman, 'Has God given you an appetite, and yet forbids its fulfillment?' Or, 'Has the Creator given you eyes to see the beauty and attractiveness of the fruits of every tree, and then denied to you the right to partake? To fulfill your 'God-given' appetite?' What the serpent is really saying is: 'Is not God harsh?'

***“The woman said to the serpent, “From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.’” (3:2-3)***

The woman’s response is a mixture of truth and falsehood, which may be interpreted as the element of doubt beginning to enter into her mind concerning the goodness of God. She correctly states that the divine prohibition did not extend to ‘all’ or ‘every’ tree in the Garden, but only to the *“tree which is in the middle of the garden,”* which we presume to be the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. But in restating the prohibition, she both augments and minimizes that actual words of Jehovah to Adam, recorded in Genesis 2:16-17,

*The LORD God commanded the man, saying, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.”*

The prohibition was against *eating* of the fruit of this tree; the woman expands that command to include *touching* and assigns the death penalty to the lesser as well as the greater offense. In addition, her rendition of the penalty for disobedience is a truncation of the actual words of God to Adam. Eve states that if she or her husband so much as touches the fruit of this tree, they will die. However, the statement of the prohibition is more complex, and the woman’s minimizing of this complexity will play directly into the serpent’s hands, and may prove decisive in the sin and fall of her husband, Adam. The phrase recorded in 2:17, rendered *“surely die”* in the New American Standard version quoted above, is more literally and appropriately to be rendered, *“dying you shall die.”*

Although it is impossible to determine from the text just how much Adam and/or Eve understood regarding ‘death’ – they had never witnessed such a thing before – or the inherent complexity contained in the penalty associated with the violation of the divine command, it is evident from the sequel and from the biblical commentary provided by the rest of Scripture, that what was

involved was far more than the physical cessation of life. The woman's statement that if she ate of the fruit, or even touched it, she would die was a simplification that implied a misunderstanding on her part regarding the properties of the fruit of the prohibited tree. In other words, she treated the fruit of the tree as poisonous, rather than understanding that it was the divine command that mattered. Some commentators surmise that, when Eve not only touched the fruit but also ate of it, and did not die, Adam was emboldened to follow his wife in transgressing the word and will of his Creator.

*"The serpent said to the woman, 'You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'"* (3:4-5)

The serpent's response to the woman has been a matter of debate for scholars both Jewish and Christian, for millennia. Was this a blatant denial of the word of Jehovah? Was Satan calling God a liar? The manner in which the New American Standard version translates the first phrase of the serpent's response would tend toward this conclusion: *"You most certainly will not die!"* But perhaps this is not the best way to translate the Hebrew (which is admittedly difficult in construction). A number of scholars, the preponderance of those consulted for this study, provide a more literal translation of the actual Hebrew: *"You shall not surely die."* The subtle (pardon the pun) relocation of the 'surely' transmutes the comment to one of bold-face challenge to the veracity of God, to the introduction of doubt in the mind of the woman. It is as if the serpent, while not shamelessly denying the penalty of transgression, nonetheless introduces a dangerous element of contingency.

This interpretation is more in keeping with the subtlety of the serpent, which craftiness implies a more oblique approach to the matter; less a 'head on' than 'round the back door' approach. "Satan, in order to deceive more covertly, would gradually proceed with cautious prevarications to lead the woman to a

contempt of the divine precept.”<sup>25</sup> The serpent – and ultimately Satan behind the snake – is being incredibly duplicitous in his speech. On the one hand he is, in a sense, ‘praising’ God: *God is too generous that He would deny Man the enjoyment of any and every tree of the Garden, right?* On the other hand, Satan is injecting doubt into the mind of the woman: *God is unduly harsh to restrict Man’s appetite by forbidding even this one tree from him, don’t you think?* He continues this duality of deception here in verse 4, insinuating on the one hand that the punishment – death – is too disproportionate to the crime – eating of the fruit of the forbidden tree. *God is too loving to allow your death merely on account of this minor infraction!* At the same time, however, the motive of the divine will is challenged: *God is not acting out of holiness or love, but from base jealousy! For in the day that you eat of this fruit, God knows that you will become like Him.”*

This attack by the serpent on the paradise of Man’s original state, represents an exhibition of demonic temptation that then serves as a paradigm for temptation throughout the ages. If one can forgive the alliteration, the devil’s deceit seeks to instill discontent and doubt into the heart of man. *Discontent* that there should be even this slightest of prohibitions contrary to the unfettered appetite (many would say ‘will’) of Man; *Doubt* that God’s reasons are truly noble, truly loving, truly good.

The whole conversation of the serpent indicates a vile scheme of seduction, designed to make the human pair discontented with the wisdom and goodness of the Divine arrangement as to their condition, and to fill them with an ambitious desire to make themselves higher than God seemed to wish that they should be.<sup>26</sup>

The most effective lies contain truth, and the father of lies has ever been aware of this fact. “Very clearly, as in all temptations, the devil’s beguilements

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<sup>25</sup> Calvin; 147.

<sup>26</sup> Jamieson, Robert, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown *A Commentary Critical, Experimental and Practical on the Old and New Testaments: Volume 1* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; 1948); 51.



are an inextricable tangle of truth and falsehood.”<sup>27</sup> The serpent speaks the ‘truth’ to the woman when he tells her that her *“eyes will be opened”* and *“you will be like God (or, perhaps, ‘a god’) to know good and evil.”* In the sequel, after Man’s Fall, God himself announces that *“Man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil, therefore...”* (3:22) It may be that from personal experience, Satan knew that the consequence of Man’s transgression would not be *immediate death*, but rather a sort of enlightenment that would heighten the sensory perception of Man to a remarkable degree. This is what is meant by their ‘eyes being opened,’ as “a correlation between verbs of seeing and verbs of knowledge or understanding is common to many languages,”<sup>28</sup> and most certainly to both Hebrew and Greek. The fact of this transgression leading not to immediate physical death, but rather to a state of being that even God calls comparable to deity, is quite remarkable in itself, and worthy of a great deal of consideration as we progress through the narrative both of the Fall and of the consequent development of human civilization.

*“When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.”* (3:6)

*When* did the woman sin? Was the sin to be found in the act of eating? Or had Eve already sinned prior to taking the fruit? When we turn to the fuller discussion of Scripture on the nature and germination of sin, we get a glimpse of that evil process that was already taking place in the woman’s heart (and, arguably, the man’s as well) before she consummated her sin in the act itself. Consider, for instance, James’ analysis of the birth of sin (and the consequent death of the soul),

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<sup>27</sup> Leupold, H. C. *Exposition of Genesis: Volume I* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House; 1942); 151

<sup>28</sup> Alter, Robert *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co.; 1996); 12.

*But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.*  
(James 1:14-15)

It is apparent that lust – inordinate desire – had welled up within the woman’s heart, along with discontent regarding the gracious provisions of God and doubt regarding the divine motives. We learn later that the man and the woman had apparently not eaten of the Tree of Life, which was permitted them, perhaps for the simple reason that the abundance of their life and of the food provided for them negated any such (unnecessary) desire. At least until Eve succumbed to the serpent’s blandishments. Speaking of the woman’s assessment of the forbidden fruit, Calvin writes, “This impure look of Eve, infected with the poison of concupiscence, was both the messenger and the witness of an impure heart.”<sup>29</sup>

Even the pattern of this final descent into overt sin is theological in nature and presentation. The Apostle John will eventually formulate the equation: “*For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.*”<sup>30</sup> Eve saw that the fruit was good for food (of course it was, it had been created by God!), answering to the lust of the flesh – the appetite of Man out from under the regulation of the divine will. Then she progressed (regressed?) to the attractiveness of the fruit, “*a delight to the eyes*” – corresponding directly with the *lust of the eyes* in John’s epistle. Finally, the woman reached the summit (or nadir, really) of the temptation: *desirable to make one wise* – answering to the deepest call within man to be as God, on his own terms and in his own time. “But whosoever desires to be wise beyond measure, him will Satan, seeing he has cast off all reverence for God, immediately precipitate into open rebellion.”<sup>31</sup> Thus the narrative of Man’s Fall is not only historical, it is paradigmatic.

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<sup>29</sup> Calvin; 151.

<sup>30</sup> I John 2:16

<sup>31</sup> Calvin; 148.

Verse 6 contains a brief but tremendously significant and enigmatic statement: *“and she gave also to her husband who was with her, and he ate.”* The face value of this phrase, supported by the Hebrew syntax, is that Adam was with Eve *the whole time* that she was conversing with the serpent. That is the simple meaning of the clause, though commentators as notable as John Calvin and the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Lutheran, H. C. Leupold, insist that it cannot mean this. Leupold writes,

The fact, however, that the prepositional phrase ‘with her’...is first found at this point, strongly suggests that at the outset, when the temptation began, Adam was not with Eve but had only joined her at this time.<sup>32</sup>

What Leupold is saying is, that the prepositional phrase with indicates that Adam was with Eve, strongly suggests that Adam was not with Eve. Say what? The reasoning behind this type of statement is the belief that, had Adam been with Eve for the duration of the temptation, he most certainly would have stood up and confronted the devil. Is this so certain? Two facts argue against such an assumption of Adam’s steadfastness. First, the paucity of words used to describe *his* acquiescence in the Fall: *“and he ate.”* That is it, a classic example of biblical understatement: *and he ate*. If he had just shown up to the party, one might expect a little more narrative whereby Eve shows her husband that the fruit is good, pleasing to the eyes, desirable to make one wise, etc., and ‘look, I have eaten the fruit, and nothing evil has befallen me!’ No, we are given simply, *and he ate*. Remarkable is the commentary by Matthew Henry, in which it is assumed that had Adam been present, he would have thwarted the serpent’s deception from the start.



**Matthew Henry (1662-1714)**

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<sup>32</sup> Leupold; 153.

*She gave also to her husband with her.* It is probably that he was not with her when she was tempted (surely, if he had, he would have interposed to prevent the sin), but came to her when she had eaten, and was prevailed upon by her to eat likewise.<sup>33</sup>

Second, we are informed by the Apostle Paul that while the woman was deceived by the serpent, the man was not. He sinned with his eyes open, so to speak, though his eyes were not ‘opened’ until he ate the forbidden fruit.

*For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman, being deceived, fell into transgression.* (I Timothy 2:13-14)

It must be remembered that we are dealing with an entirely irrational and unexpected turn of events in the history of Man: that God’s perfect creation should sin is, by any rational analysis, inconceivable. Thus we cannot assume that Adam would have stood firm while Eve fell, had he been there all the while.



JOHN GILL, D.D.

**John Gill (1697-1771)**

Rather, we must take the wording at face value – unless we have a compelling reason from within Scripture that we should not – and understand Adam as being there the whole time. John Gill includes a reference in his commentary on this verse, that Jewish scholars “infer from hence, that Adam was with her all the while, and heard the discourse between the serpent and her, yet did not interpose nor dissuade his wife from eating the fruit.”<sup>34</sup>

It has been the classic interpretation of Christian commentators throughout the ages, that the seduction of Eve was by Satan, and that of Adam occurred later through Eve. It must be noted that there is no biblical evidence for this view; that Eve gave to her husband *who was with her*, without the least

<sup>33</sup> Henry, Matthew *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Hendrickson Publishers; 1991); 20.

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/genesis-3-6.html> accessed November 3, 2015.

mention of them having been apart at any time. The conventional view was enthroned in poetic verse by no less than John Milton in his classic *Paradise Lost*. Fredson Bowers, in his analytical *Adam, Eve, and the Fall in Paradise Lost*, predicates the entire structure of Milton's poem on the this biblically-tenuous presumption,

Indeed, if we are unwilling to accept his psychological analysis of the reasons that led Eve to fall a victim to Satan, and in turn Adam a victim to Eve, the poem will fail.<sup>35</sup>

Milton's own explanation for Adam's willingly following his wife in transgression of God's commandment is due to his deep love for the woman God had given him, a love that motivated a quasi-martyr syndrome in which Adam chooses solidarity in sin with his wife rather than obedience to God. In Book IX of *Paradise Lost*, the temptation of Eve and the Fall of the first human pair is set forth in verse. When Adam returns to the part of the Garden that Eve had been tending (while he worked a different part of the Garden during the time the serpent was beguiling his wife), Eve unfolds to him what has transpired, to which news Adam is initially horrified.



**John Milton (1608-74)**

*Thus Eve with Countenance blithe her storie told;  
But in her Cheek distemper flushing glowd.  
On th' other side, Adam, soon as he heard  
The fatal Trespass don by Eve, amaz'd,  
Astonied stood and Blank, while horror chill  
Ran through his veins, and all his joynts relax'd;  
From his slack hand the Garland wreath'd for Eve  
Down drop'd, and all the faded Roses shed:  
Speechless he stood and pale, till thus at length  
First to himself he inward silence broke.*

[*Paradise Lost*; Book IX.886-895]

<sup>35</sup> [http://www.jstor.org/stable/1261283?seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1261283?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents) accessed November 3, 2015.

The two converse with regard to Eve's transgression, and Adam allows his love for that "*bone of my bone*" to take from her hand and also eat of the forbidden fruit.

*She gave him of that fair enticing Fruit  
With liberal hand: he scrupl'd not to eat  
Against his better knowledge, not deceav'd,  
But fondly overcome with Femal charm.*

[Book IX.996-999]

This has become the standard interpretation even among Reformed theologians, who as a rule do not believe that Adam was present with Eve during her conversation with the serpent. But there are several problems with this view. One, it presents us with a sin before the Fall; that is, the greater love that Adam has for his wife than for his God. Two, it ill comports with Adam's very quick repudiation of his wife (and of God who gave her to him) when confronted by Jehovah with his rebellion: "*The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.*" (3:12)

That there was some discourse between the man and his wife is evident from God's later address to Adam, stating that he "*listened to the voice of your wife*" in regard to the forbidden fruit. However, this does not prove of itself that there was a later conversation between the first pair, but only that Adam failed to intervene in the conversation between his wife and the serpent, and rather gave sanction to her own thoughts, expressed but not recorded, as she moved from obedience to sin. In the event, as the next verse seems to indicate, the consequence of their mutual sin appears to have happened simultaneously.

***"Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings."*** (3:7)

This verse presents an insuperable problem for those who believe that Eve was tempted, and succumbed to that temptation, alone. Each commentator espousing this view attempts to explain why the effect of the forbidden fruit

seems to avoid hitting Eve until Adam also partakes, which on the view must be some time later. As difficult as it may be to accept the spectre of Adam standing alongside his wife the whole while the serpent is deceiving her, and our first father and the first husband remaining silent, this remains the simplest interpretation of the text. He was *with her*; he took the fruit from her hand *and ate*; and the *eyes of both of them were opened*. Being the one who received the divine prohibition directly, this straightforward rendering of the events also goes far to explain how it was that Adam was not deceived, but rather knew full well what he was doing.

This verse also closes the narrative of the Fall proper, ending with reference to where it began at the close of Chapter 2 – the nakedness of the man and woman.

*And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed... (2:25)*  
*(3:7)...Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked...*

It is significant that the awareness and shame of nakedness is the first manifestation of Man's loss of innocence, as it continues to be the same in the case of children. This is not to say that any child born naturally of Adam's race is ever 'innocent' – though the doctrine of Original Sin is not germane to these particular verses under study – but only that there is in a child's life a time when they no longer freely walk the house *sans* clothing, they insist that the bathroom door be closed when they are in there, and they begin even to lock their bedroom door when dressing. It is as if just as death is a reminder of the Fall at the end of a human lifetime, so this 'loss of innocence' serves as a vivid reenactment of that primal sin in which *all died because all sinned*.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Cp. Romans 5:12.

**Week 3:           Where Sin Abounds...****Text Reading:    Genesis 3:8 - 24**

*"The music of man's life is no longer in harmony  
with the divine order and glory in which it was set."  
(John Laidlaw)*

What must have gone through our first parents' minds after they ate of the forbidden fruit? Heightened sensitivity to their surroundings? A new awareness of themselves is at least implied by the statement that they realized that they were naked. As to their newfound modesty, this in and of itself is not a bad thing – certainly not in fallen man, at least. We must also consider that in this new state of being, as it were, they realized as well that they were still alive – perhaps more 'alive' in their own estimation than they remembered being prior to their transgression. Furthermore, there is no reason to doubt that they experienced *pleasure* in the forbidden transaction, the *momentary, transient pleasure of sin*.<sup>37</sup> A catastrophe has just taken place, but it is not immediately evident that Adam and Eve fully realized this fact. Their worldview had changed; the framework of their thinking was irredeemably altered; but they would not come to an awareness of just how radically things had changed until they once again came in contact with God.

It is commonplace to think that Adam and Eve immediately fell into despair and despondency, having transgressed the simple prohibition given to them by their gracious Creator. But this is to minimize the deceitful nature of sin – the first sin as well as all subsequent sins. The fruit was good, and they did not die – the only thing they noticed was that they were each naked, and they promptly remedied that 'problem.' It may very well have been the case that their senses were bombarded with a myriad of new input; that they were, in the modern vernacular, 'on a trip' caused by their eyes having been opened through sin. What is not apparent is that the first couple immediately realized that their

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<sup>37</sup> Heb. 11:25



alteration was indeed a 'Fall.' Within the immediate company of each other and the demon-inspired serpent, the event that just took place might well have seemed to them a 'Rise.' At least, that is, until they heard the voice of God in the Garden. Laidlaw comments,

There is a sense in which his spiritual fall is an advance in knowledge; but it is followed by the immediate cessation of that divine fellowship and paradisaic felicity in which he was created.<sup>38</sup>

True, the 'cessation' of this fellowship and felicity was indeed immediate; but Adam's awareness of his loss may not have been so immediate. It is rather the nature of sin to dull the sinner's self-awareness of having sinned, and this predicament is only remedied fully by an encounter with God. This is not to say that such an encounter necessarily remedies the *sin*, for countless members of Adam's fallen race have encountered God only to reject Him and to "*love the darkness rather than the light.*" But it remains the case, at least if Adam's experience is paradigmatic for his posterity, that man's awareness of sin comes to him through some manifestation of the divine presence. In Paul's consideration of this phenomenon, the apostle attributed his own awareness of sin to the advent of the knowledge of the Law into his life,

*I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died...*  
(Romans 7:9)

This encounter would come to Adam soon after his transgression; presumably the very evening of the day in which he and his wife ate of the forbidden fruit (Gen. 3:8). What is remarkable about the narrative is the fact that the man and his wife did not die when they ate the fruit, and that the narrative does not seem to address this reality. Other than the promise of eventual corporeal dissolution mentioned in the judicial sentence pronounced upon the

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<sup>38</sup> Laidlaw; 212.

man, - “For you are dust and to dust you will return.” – there is no comparison between the statement of the penalty incumbent upon transgression in Genesis 2:27 and the reality that in the day that man did eat of the forbidden fruit, he did not die.

There are only two possible exegetical solutions to this conundrum, at least to anyone who accepts the inspiration and authority of Scripture. The first is that God suspended the sentence. This, however, is very unlikely, since it would portray the Divine and Holy God as *immediately* suspending sentence for the very first sin, a precedent that would rather encourage sin in the future than deter it. The second option is that the phrase recorded in Genesis 2:27, “in the day



**Franz Delitzsch (1813-90)**

you eat of it, *dying you shall die*” cannot refer only to physical death, but rather to an ethical-spiritual-physical complex of death that was inaugurated by the first sin. Franz Delitzsch, in his *System of Biblical Psychology*, calls this result of sin the “Ethico-Physical Disturbance,” thus indicating that there is to be understood a more complex definition of ‘dying’ than

merely the cessation of natural, physical life.<sup>39</sup>

A detailed discussion of what exactly (if ‘exactly’ can ever be indubitably determined) happened to man when he sinned, is properly a subject of systematic theology, under the heading of ‘Man and Sin.’ Yet it is important to the study and exegesis of this section of Genesis – not only Chapter 3, but through Chapter 11 and beyond – to consider that man’s physical life not only did not end immediately upon the Fall, but actually extended for a duration that can only be considered amazing by modern standards. In brief, what happened to man’s constitution mirrored his creation, with his return to the dust being the last phase of his ‘death’ as it was the first phase of his creation. Genesis 2:27 promises the unraveling of Genesis 2:7,

<sup>39</sup> Delitzsch, Franz *A System of Biblical Psychology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark; 1867); 151.

*Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.* (Genesis 2:7)

Delitzsch describes this process and progress of death in the first, and every subsequent, sinner.

In consequence of the first sin, the internal nature of man became possessed by death, by the dissolution of the previous unity of the manifold powers interwoven in the life of the spirit and of the soul; and by the disappearance of the spiritual life in God's image and its reflection in the soul...The spirit had fallen away from the love of God, and the soul from the government of God.<sup>40</sup>

With Genesis 3:8 we begin to see the progression of this dissolution of the first man and of mankind.

*"They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" He said, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself."* (3:8-10)

The 'cool of the day' is literally 'the wind (or spirit) of the day,' the word used here being the Hebrew *ruach* familiar to us as 'spirit,' 'breath,' or 'wind.' The time is most likely the evening, though there is no way of telling exactly which day it is, much less that the Fall of Man occurred on the first Sabbath of Creation history. The prose of the narrative at this point is not intended to give the reader an exact sense of timing, but rather of something that was a normal occurrence between the Creator and the crown of His creation; between God and Man. That is: *intimate* and *immediate* communion. It was apparently a commonplace thing for God and the first couple to walk and converse in the Garden before sin had 'made a separation' between them. Thus we are left with the strong impression that God is still on the same wavelength, but that the man and woman have been seriously put out of tune.

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<sup>40</sup> Delitzsch; 153.

The divine query, *“Where are you,”* must also not be allowed to in any way impinge upon the essential divine attributes of omnipresence and omniscience. A grossly literal interpretation of the passage would not only have God with legs (walking), but also without the knowledge of where Adam was or what had just transpired. While such a view may satisfy a Socinian or Open Theist, it cannot be acceptable to anyone who understands the dignity of the Divine Nature and who submits all exegetical interpretation to the standard of the self-disclosure of that Nature. Although it is anachronistic from the viewpoint of when the passage was written, surely Psalm 139 applies to the narrative here in Genesis 3.

*Where can I go from Your Spirit?  
Or where can I flee from Your presence?  
If I ascend to heaven, You are there;  
If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there.  
If I take the wings of the dawn,  
If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea,  
Even there Your hand will lead me,  
And Your right hand will lay hold of me.  
If I say, “Surely the darkness will overwhelm me,  
And the light around me will be night,”  
Even the darkness is not dark to You,  
And the night is as bright as the day.  
Darkness and light are alike to You.* (Psalm 139:7-12)

It is rather more correct to understand God’s question as that drawing of Adam to the bar of divine interrogation and judgment, bringing immediately to Adam the awareness of disturbance and disruption. “Mistrust and fear have, for one thing, taken the place of the trust and the free communion with Yahweh, that had previously prevailed.”<sup>41</sup> As far as the narrative tells us, it was at this point that fear gripped Adam and his wife: the deep and violent aversion of darkness when confronted with the light. God’s questioning of Adam is the means by which the divine holiness sets matters in their proper perspective. *‘Something has*

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<sup>41</sup> Leupold; 156.

*changed in you, Adam,' it is as if the Lord says, 'Instead of fleeing from the tempter, you now flee from Me.'* Leupold expands,

God is not seeking information. God's questions are pedagogic. Man is to be made to realize that something must be radically wrong when the creature, who hitherto had his chief delight in associating with the good and loving Father, slinks away in hiding under the trees deep in the garden.<sup>42</sup>

In light of the earlier discussion about just how much Adam realized concerning the effects of his transgression, his answer to the divine query is significant, *"I was afraid because I was naked."* Not, *"I was afraid because I had transgressed Your command."* Furthermore, there is a sense in which even Adam's pitiful evasion is not entirely accurate, for he and his wife had apparently covered their nakedness with loin coverings made of leaves. The 'nakedness' of which the man speaks, therefore, is deeper and more meaningful than just the lack of covering for his private parts, it was an awareness that even the makeshift loincloths could not erase. Perhaps it is best described, again anachronistically, by the writer to the Hebrews, *"And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account."*<sup>43</sup> The Law, in the Person of the Lawgiver, had (re)entered Adam's life; now sin comes alive and Adam dies.

*"And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate." Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." (3:11-13)*

Even confronted inescapably with his sin, man nonetheless continues to dodge and evade, and to place blame on others that rightfully belongs on himself. Once again the interrogation by God is not in order to derive

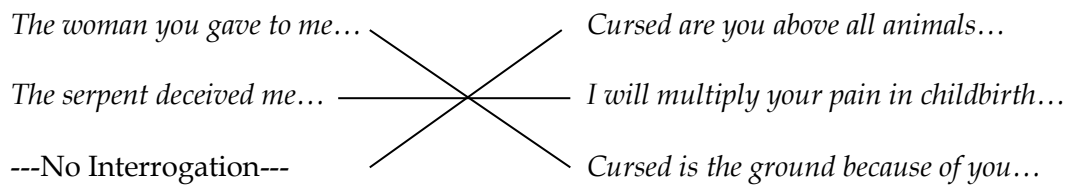
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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*; 157.

<sup>43</sup> Heb. 4:13 (NKJV)

information of which the divine mind was ignorant. Rather it is the case that God’s line of questioning reveals both the divine omniscience and the deceitfulness of sin in Adam. God knew full well that the serpent did not tell Adam and Eve that they were naked, that this knowledge could only have come to the first pair as a result of their transgression in regard to the forbidden tree. We must never for a moment think that the One before whom all things are ‘naked and open’ did not omnisciently witness the entire discourse between the serpent and the woman, as well as the unrecorded conversation between the woman and her husband. No, the divine question, “*Who told you...*” is once again intended to drive home to Adam the self-inflicted nature of his now-incurable moral wound. Luther paraphrases, “You were not ashamed because you were naked. Nor did My voice scare you. But your conscience accused you, because you ate of the forbidden tree.”<sup>44</sup> But the poison of sin has already entered Adam’s bloodstream, and his response to God is very far from the repentance stimulated by godly sorrow. He passes the buck.

Indeed, he puts the blame back on God Himself, though he does so by way of the woman God had given him. Adam begins a cascade of blame that begins with him blaming his wife (and by implication God, who have her to him) and moves to Eve blaming the serpent. God’s pronouncement of judgment and punishment will move back up this descending chorus of fault shifting: from the serpent (and the evil spirit behind it), to the woman, and finally to the man in a chiastic poetic pattern. There is great significance in the fact that no divine interrogation is found with regard to the serpent, only a pronouncement of judgment and eventual defeat.




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<sup>44</sup> Luther; 76.

*The LORD God said to the serpent,*

*“Because you have done this, cursed are you more than all cattle,  
And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you will go,  
And dust you will eat all the days of your life;*

*And I will put enmity*

*Between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed;*

*He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.”*

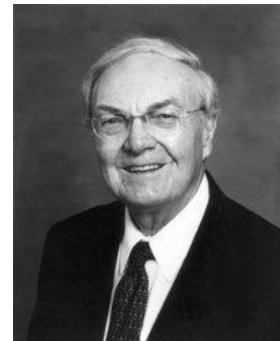
**(3:14-15)**

This is a dual judgment – one upon the snake that was the instrument of temptation and overthrow, and another upon the spiritual being that was the motive force behind the snake. The first, in verse 14, establishes the snake as a perpetual reminder of what had transpired in the Garden between this subtlest of all God’s creatures and the crown jewel of His creation. There has since been an almost universal aversion on the part of man to snakes, one that is – if the stereotype may be forgiven – even more intense between *women* and snakes. But the snake is an irrational animal (assuming that animals were irrational in Eden), and it is evident that the judgment pronounced by Jehovah addresses a far more powerful and sinister being, whom we discover later in Scripture to be none other than Satan, the accuser of the brethren. It is to him that the next verse is addressed, a verse that contains the prophetic seeds of his eventual destruction, and the promise of the ‘seed of woman’ who would bring this destruction to pass.

This passage – Genesis 3:15 – is the *protevangelium*, the ‘first’ or ‘proto’ Gospel. In spite of vehement attempts by liberal scholars from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century to the present to deny the weight of biblical evidence, it remains the majority view of Christian commentators that God here pronounced that judgment upon Satan that was to be executed by the Son of God, the Seed of Woman, Jesus Christ. However vague the promise must be, standing as it does at the very beginning of redemptive history, there can be no doubt that the sense of the curse is far deeper than a mere animosity between men and snakes. The snake, “must, as it were, serve as a visible reminder of the kingdom of darkness, and Satan its head, who

had employed him as his instrument.”<sup>45</sup> More significantly, however, Jehovah himself acts to set enmity between what becomes two lines of descent: one from the Woman and one from the serpent. Thus He promises constant generational warfare and struggle between two groups – their identities to be discussed below – that will culminate in the wounding of one particular ‘seed’ of the woman by the serpent, and the bruising of the serpent’s head by this seed.

There is a great deal that can and should be said about the promised Seed of Woman, and about the cosmic conflict contained in this simple verse. But first we must unpack the ‘enmity’ clause in verse 15, so that we are in a position to follow and understand the unfolding of human history from Genesis 4 and beyond, even to the modern day. *“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed.”* Again, this is a contemptibly trite statement if all it means is that mankind will hate snakes, and that snakes will be afraid of mankind. The subsequent chapters of this section of Genesis will show that Jehovah is here establishing two distinct lineages of mankind – the ‘seed of the woman’ and the ‘seed of the serpent.’ Bruce Waltke writes, “Humanity is now divided into two communities; the elect, who love God, and the reprobate,



**Bruce Waltke (b. 1930)**

who love self.”<sup>46</sup> The tracings of these two communities will follow in Genesis 5 through 11, with the ‘seed of woman’ lineage being narrowed through such marquee individuals as Seth and Shem, and then beyond Genesis 12 with the further constricting of this line through Abraham, then Isaac, and then Jacob, and finally Judah. It is the line of redemptive election set in contrast to the lineage of human fallenness and rebellion. “We have here the sum of the whole matter,

<sup>45</sup> Hengstenberg, E. W. *Christology of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications; 1970); 37.

<sup>46</sup> Waltke, Bruce *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan; 2001); 93.



and the rest of the Bible does but explain the nature of this struggle, the persons who wage it, and the manner and consequence of the victory."<sup>47</sup>

Once again it is the case that a thorough exposition of this reality belongs to the *systematic theological* analysis of the passage. But it is sufficient to note that this view – of two distinct lineages of mankind – is upheld by the comments of both Jesus Christ and of Paul. The Lord clearly alludes to this passage of Scripture – the narrative of the Fall – when He condemns the unbelieving Pharisees of His day,

*Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. **You are of your father the devil**, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.*

(John 8:42-44)

And Paul also has this particular verse in mind, as well as the gracious lineage of redemption of which he and his fellow believers are a part, when he comforted the Roman church with these words,

*For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil. **And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly.***

(Romans 16:19-20)

Finally, for now at least, the Apostle John ties the concepts of the two 'seeds' with that of the ultimate victory of the Seed of Woman over the devil.

*Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. **The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.** No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.*

(I John 3:7-9)

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<sup>47</sup> Ellicott, Charles John *Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Volume I* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House; 1954); 25.

We must keep in mind this divine division of the human race – the first evidence of sovereign election within redemptive history – as we progress through the coming chapters. This paradigm will serve as the framework of the Holy Spirit, working through Moses' pen, in determining what is included and what is left out; what is said about one group of people, and what is said about the other. It will also provide a safe and sane explanation for one of the most enigmatic phrases in all of Scripture – the reference to the '*sons of men*' and the '*sons of God*' in Chapter 6.

But for now we can spend some time focusing on the *protevangelium* – the promise of a Champion who would avenge and redeem the race that Adam had just plunged into sin and despair. While it may be a case of simply poetic chiasm (see above), it is nonetheless comforting – and very much in keeping with the revealed nature of God's grace – that Jehovah would pronounce both the condemnation of Satan and the promise of a Redeemer *before* turning to the pronouncement of judicial sentencing upon Adam and Eve. And while the *protevangelium* was addressed to the serpent, it was of absolutely no comfort or benefit to him, but rather was obliquely addressed to Adam and his wife, to give them hope in a hopeless situation.

The essential elements of the Gospel are clearly contained in Genesis 3:15, justifying thoroughly the title *protevangelium* that it has borne for generations of Christian scholarship. "There is within it, as an oak lies within an acorn, all the great truths which make up the gospel of Christ."<sup>48</sup> The monergism of God is present: the promise is entirely motivated by divine sovereign grace and from no merit or worthiness to be found in man. At the moment the promised destruction of the serpent is announced, the man and the woman were still very

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<sup>48</sup> Spurgeon, C. H. *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit: Volume 22 (1876)* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications; 1971); 662.

much in doubt as to what their own fate might be; they were certainly in no position as yet to rejoice in the fate of their foe. The *protevangelium*, like all Gospel



**C. H. Spurgeon (1834-92)**  
of hope than merit, even if merit can be supposed to exist."<sup>49</sup>

Furthermore, the *protevangelium* concentrates the entire and ultimate struggle to a contest between God's Champion and that evil being, the devil, who led our first parents astray (though the guilt of their sin is quite evidently accounted to their own wills). Satan usurped the allegiance that Man had once given to God; God will recover that honor – again, for His own Name's sake – and destroy the pretender's kingdom. If any doubt remains regarding the eventually-revealed identities of the two combatants elucidated in this verse, we may consider Jesus' own self-awareness concerning His mission as the supreme opponent of the 'ruler of this world.'

*Jesus answered and said, "This voice has not come for My sake, but for your sakes. Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself."* (John 12:30-32)

And,

*Now I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe. I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me; but so that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me.* (John 14:29-31)

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<sup>49</sup> *Idem.*

We began this lesson by considering what the man and the woman might have been thinking – what their ‘state of mind’ may have been – immediately subsequent to their sin. Though it does not bear all that much on the overall section of Genesis under investigation in this study, yet it will shed light on other passages – primarily prophetic and apocalyptic – to consider what *Satan* might have been thinking. It is all too easy to grant the devil a degree of omniscience that he by no means possesses, and to think that the commander of the fallen legions of the angelic host had more knowledge of God’s redemptive plans than he did, in fact, possess. Charles Spurgeon pictures the archdemon as gleefully contemplating his conquest of Man, when God intervenes to set the story straight.

He [Satan] had in the worst sense destroyed a part of God’s works, he had introduced sin into the new world, he had stamped the human race with his own image, and gained new forces to promote rebellion and to multiply transgression, and therefore he felt that sort of gladness which a fiend can know who bears a hell within him. But now God comes in, takes up the quarrel personally, and causes him to be disgraced on the very battle-field upon which he had just gained a temporary success.<sup>50</sup>

The concept of the ‘Seed’ forms one of the most important, if not the most important, threads that will run through and hold together the entirety of progressive revelation. Here at the beginning of sin, grace abounds, and the promise of the ‘seed’ would be the hope and stay of Eve, of Lamech the father of Noah, and of Abraham, just to name a few whose recorded comments reveal their earnest expectations. This thread will run, of course, to the One born of *woman* in a unique and miraculous manner – the Incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ – whose coming was still expected so many thousands of years after the Fall by the devout of Israel.

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<sup>50</sup> Spurgeon; 661.

...and round this promised Deliverer the rest of Scripture groups itself. Leave out these words, and all the inspired teaching which follows would be an ever-widening river without a fountain-head. But necessarily with the fall came the promise of restoration. Grace is no after-thought, but enters the world side by side with sin.<sup>51</sup>

*“To the woman He said,  
 “I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth,  
 In pain you will bring forth children;  
 Yet your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”* (3:16)

Jehovah next addresses the woman, but the divine word is not a curse; it is a punishment. It is also a word of divine grace. We must consider again the probable mindset of Eve at this point. She had eaten of the forbidden fruit, as had her husband, and neither had died...yet. The fear that gripped Adam at the sound of the divine voice calling in the Garden, held Eve’s heart in its thrall as well. The words just spoken to the serpent – a perennial curse culminating in defeat – did not bode well for the woman and the man, when God finally turned His attention and His justice toward them. But in that curse upon the serpent, perhaps Eve heard the stirrings of hope founded on divine grace: *I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed...* Jehovah speaks of the woman’s offspring, from which would one day come a Champion who would set all things to right again.

If Eve listened with the ears of faith – and we have no way of knowing whether either Adam or Eve were *believers* – she might have heard the grace contained in the curse of Genesis 3:15. But if not, the fact that she would not immediately die is quickly confirmed to her in the sentence of punishment directed specifically toward her. *“I will greatly increase your misery in childbirth...”* Mothers may wonder if Eve truly understood what God was saying here, since she had not yet given birth. But however much Eve may have understood the ‘travail of childbirth’ promised in these words, it is evident from her testimony at

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<sup>51</sup> Ellicott; 25.

the birth of Cain, *"I have gotten a manchild by the Lord."*<sup>52</sup> Eve says something similar at the birth of Seth, who in her mind takes the place of her murdered son Abel. Childbirth became the evidence of divine grace to the human race, the continuation of the 'seed of woman' until that promised One should come. In a sense, childbirth constitutes a form of salvation for womankind, as it serves as a continuous reminder of the *protevangelium*. This is perhaps the meaning of Paul's enigmatic statement in I Timothy 2:15.

*Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.*

The divine word to Eve is two-part, as was the curse upon the serpent/devil. Eve was the one who conversed with the serpent and who was thereby deceived. It was her voice that convinced or goaded her husband to take the fateful step of disobedience to the divine command. She who was created to be a 'helpmeet' to her husband became the instrument of his fall - though we will see that this fact does not mitigate Adam's guilt. Nonetheless, a relationship that was intended to be mutually beneficial and an essential parity will now become a hierarchy and a struggle for supremacy.

This is not perhaps readily obvious by what the Lord says to Eve, *"Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."* (NKJV) If anything, this sounds like harmonious submissiveness - a loving, devoted wife submitting to a (hopefully) benevolent but authoritative husband. If it were not for the fact that the exact same phrase is used in God's interview with Cain (just before the murder of Abel), we might be warranted in interpreting this part of Genesis 3:16 in a positive light, though even then it would seem somewhat out of place in a sentence of punishment. But the wording in Genesis 4:7,

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<sup>52</sup> Gen. 4:1



punishment meted out to Adam is, like the previous words from the Lord, also twofold. The first aspect is the one visible on the surface: work, which was a creation ordinance prior to the advent of sin, would now become sorrowful and tedious. The word 'toil' is the same as that used in verse 16 to describe the pains of childbirth, literally 'pangs.' Man's once glorious responsibility as gardener and husbandman would now become a lifelong struggle, pitting him against the earth over which he was supposed to rule and have dominion. He retains that dominion, but the animate and inanimate forces of creation will no longer be in willing subjection; rather they will be in rebellion to Man as Man is in rebellion to God. "The ground, the *adamah* out of which Adam had been formed, instead of being as heretofore his friend and willing subject, becomes unfruitful, and must be forced by toil and labour to yield its produce."<sup>53</sup>

That is the second aspect of the divine sentence pronounced upon Adam: that the consequence of his sin would permeate the entirety of the created order: "Cursed is the ground *for your sake*," or "*on account of you*." Rather, "*because of your sin*" as the Apostle Paul explains it in Romans 8.

*For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.*

(Romans 8:20-22)

Man does not immediately perish upon this first disobedience. Rather he sets in motion the corruption of death into the world (*cp.* Romans 5:12) that will permeate not only all of Adam's descendants, but the whole of creation itself. The progression of sin will mar every human relationship, while yet mankind will nonetheless continue to strive for the supremacy over God. Man has become mortal, and his life can now be cut short by murder or by an act of divine justice, as we shall see in Chapter 4 and Chapter 6. But murder or judgment

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<sup>53</sup> Ellicott; 26.



notwithstanding, death is on the horizon for all men: *For from dust you were formed and to dust you shall return.*

The longevity of the antediluvians, alleged as mythological and legendary by liberal Bible scholars, is but a testimony to the power of life that was originally in Adam prior to the Fall. In a manner fully consonant with modern discoveries regarding genetics, the fatal poison of sin concentrated as it progressed from generation to generation – a fact that will be poetically highlighted in the seventh generation from Adam, by the stark contrast between ‘cousins’ Lamech and Enoch. Lineage and procreation now become the focus in mankind’s story: “Immortality is replaced by progeny, opening the door to redemptive history.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Waltke; 94.

**Week 4: The Propagation of Hope****Text Reading: Genesis 3:20 – 4:1**

*“Our life is since only a shadow of life.”*  
(Franz Delitzsch)

Adam and Eve did not die, and to all indications they would not immediately die. They would not only live, but carry on with life to a second generation. They had destroyed the idyllic Garden and hopelessly corrupted and tarnished the image of God which they themselves bore. Their transgression brought a curse upon both mankind and the created world that only the passing of years would reveal in all its comprehensiveness and intensity. But they did not die; and they had to go on. The concluding verses of Genesis 3 tell us that, in going *on* they could not go *back*, itself another essential characteristic of sin. In reading the narrative of Man moving on from Eden, the question that seems to arise among most commentators is ‘How much did Adam understand?’ or, more importantly, ‘How much did Adam believe?’ The general tendency is to find faith at every turn; but there is a critical ingredient missing.

All evangelical theologians stand upon the biblical truth that a sinner is justified not by works, but by faith. Adam and Eve both do and say things in the



**Gerhard von Rad (1901-71)**

aftermath of the Fall that indicate a measure of belief in the promise(s) of God which accompanied the divine punishment of their sin. From this perspective, writers as diverse as the conservative Baptist Charles Spurgeon and the liberal Lutheran theologian Gerhard von Rad find *faith* in the statements of Adam and Eve – Adam’s naming of his wife ‘Eve,’ and Eve’s magnificent at the birth of her first son. And it may indeed be the case that Adam and Eve were granted the grace of saving faith; but it must be noted that an important component of saving faith is not mentioned – at least not explicitly – with reference to either our first

father or our first mother: *repentance*. Thus on the one hand, we read in Adam's and Eve's comments at least a working understanding of the promise of God to extend the human race and, in that extension, to bring about the Seed of Woman who would champion the cause of God against the serpent. But on the other hand, we must be careful as we traverse the history of the antediluvian period, that we not read saving faith too frequently among the generations between Adam and Noah. We must keep in mind that the 'Hall of Faith' in Hebrews 11 begins not with Adam, but with Abel - though even this is no definitive proof of Adam's reprobation. Frankly, in many if not most cases, we just do not know the eternal state of a biblical character's soul, and we ought to leave it at that.

The cause of presumption with regard to the salvation of individuals is twofold. First, there is the natural desire of believers to welcome into their number past dignitaries - such as the Founder of the Human Race (or the 'Founding Fathers' of the United States). In this endeavor any straw, any mention of 'God' or 'Providence,' is often grasped and clung to as evidence of the redeeming faith of this or that famous figure of the past. But this error derives itself from the second source of the overall misapprehension: the failure to understand that the redemptive history of God involves the entire human race. To be sure, some of that involvement is inveterate antagonism - as between the 'sons of the woman' and the 'sons of the serpent.' But the grace of God touches all mankind, and in every nation and in every age God has not been without a witness, as the Apostle Paul states in Acts 14,

*Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them, who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.* (Acts 14:15-17)

This 'witness' was not limited to the natural laws and the common benefits of God's grace, for the remarkable wisdom of man in all ages testifies to the residual image that was once his in purity. Thus there are traces of the truth in the ancient cosmologies, in the piety of the pagans, and in the philosophy of the Greek - none of which, of course, is clear and none of it salvific. For this reason the apologists of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century Church wished to make Socrates a Christian, and the fundamentalists patriots of our own era desire the same for George Washington. Socrates spoke of a Supreme Being (or at least Plato has us believe that Socrates thus spoke), and George Washington occasionally mentioned 'God' and 'Providence.' And Adam named his wife 'Eve,' and Eve praised God (or so it seems) for the birth of a son. These are but examples of the abiding witness of God throughout human history, and of the fact that while all are equally blind to saving faith, not all dwell in equal intellectual or spiritual darkness. But none of these examples are indisputably examples of saving faith, and in the end we must stand on the 'solid foundation,' that "*The Lord knows those who are His.*"<sup>55</sup>

*Now the man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living.*  
(3:20)

Interpreters make the assumption that this verse is located in chronological order with respect to the events recorded, though some correctly admit that this may not be the case at all. Ancient writers organized their material *thematically* far more often than *chronologically*. If the first woman's name had originally been 'Eve,' or if it had not, there is good reason for Moses to include the 'naming' of Adam's wife at this point, immediately following the promise of propagation for the human race. It is also in keeping with Adam's role as the 'namer' of the animals that he would also give a name to the first

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<sup>55</sup> II Timothy 2:19.

woman. Thus regardless of the chronology of the event, the meaning of it is clear – given to us explicitly in the text – and the location of it is logical.

Up to this point the woman is referred to as just that: ‘woman,’ the Hebrew *ishsha* corresponding to *ish*, ‘man.’ Here Adam gives her a proper name, perhaps in response to God referring him no longer as ‘the man,’ but as ‘Adam’ in verse 17. The woman’s new name is *chevah* (ηφΥαΞ) which is phonetically similar to *chayah* (ηφΨΞ), which means ‘to live.’ Our English equivalent, ‘Eve,’ is but the transliteration of the Hebrew. The text itself gives us Adam’s reasoning behind the name, “because she was the mother of all the living.” Clearly the reference is to the progeny that was to belong to Adam and Eve together, as Eve was not the mother of all living beings, and the reference is to the promise of verse 16, that the woman would give birth. Through childbirth the line of Man is continued, and the hope of the Seed prolonged.

Many commentators find in this act of Adam’s naming his wife Eve, an incipient faith on the part of the first man, so recently fallen. Gerhard von Rad comments that “one must the man’s naming of the woman as an act of faith,” though as a liberal German scholar he associates that faith not so much with eternal salvation as “an embracing of life, which as a great miracle and mystery is maintained and carried by the motherhood of woman over hardship and death.”<sup>56</sup> Most evangelical commentators are more forthright in claiming for Adam sincere and saving faith. Luther is so bold to state that “It appears from the text that Adam had received the Holy Spirit and was enlightened by Him in a marvelous way.”<sup>57</sup> Matthew Henry is more timid than Luther (which should not surprise us): “Adam probably had regard to the blessing of a Redeemer, the promised Seed, in calling his wife Eve, or life; for He should be the life of all believers, and in Him all the families of the earth should be blessed.”<sup>58</sup> H. C.

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<sup>56</sup> Von Rad, Gerhard *Genesis: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press; 1972); 96.

<sup>57</sup> Luther; *Genesis*; 85.

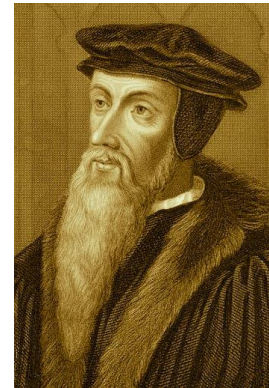
<sup>58</sup> Henry, Matthew *Commentary on the Whole Bible*;  
<http://www.christnotes.org/commentary.php?b=1&c=3&com=mhc>, accessed November 17, 2015.

Leupold, however, follows and even expands Luther's confidence in Adam's faith (again, not surprising): "This, then, was on Adam's part, as far as was possible under the circumstances, a true and living faith in Christ."<sup>59</sup>

These are examples of what was discussed earlier in this lesson, that is, the tendency to see salvation in passages that really do not speak so clearly. Andrew Fuller is more cautious in his interpretation of Adam's act.

But it is generally supposed...that in calling his wife *life*, or *living*, he intended more that that she would be the mother of all mankind; that it is expressive of his faith in the promise of her victorious Seed destroying what Satan had succeeded in introducing - *death*, and that thus she should be the means of *immortal life* to all who should live in him. **If such was his meaning**, we may consider this as the first evidence in favour of his being renewed in the spirit of his mind.<sup>60</sup>

John Calvin offers the most guarded, and biblically defensible, comment on the passage. He rejects the assumption that Adam exhibited the faith and foresight so often attributed to him through his naming of his wife, Eve. On this Calvin writes, "This would be a noble and even heroic fortitude of mind," but concludes that it was most likely not what Moses intended to convey with regard to



**John Calvin (1509-64)**

Adam's train of thought. Calvin opts for a more pragmatic interpretation of Adam's motives, and one that is at least borne out by the fact that no further word is given in Scripture concerning a 'believing' Adam.

Nevertheless, I do not doubt that, when he heard the declaration of God concerning the prolongation of life, he began again to breathe and to take courage; and then, as one revived, he gave his wife a name derived from *life*; but it does not follow, that by a faith accordant with the word of God, he triumphed, as he ought to have done, over death.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Leupold; 177.

<sup>60</sup> Fuller; 17. Bold emphasis added to highlight a very important caveat.

<sup>61</sup> Calvin, *John Commentary on the Old Testament: Volume 1*; 181.

This point has been belabored (and indeed it has) only to lay a foundation for the continuing study of Genesis, and to provide a hermeneutical caution to the study of the Old Testament (as well as secular history) in general. Of the examples given, only Calvin refuses to “*go beyond that which is written*” and to conclude matters concerning Adam’s heart that are known only to God, and are not revealed with any certainty in the Bible. It is sober reminder that men can be affected by the grace of God – and even find themselves rejoicing in that grace – without receiving the benefit of that grace unto salvation. It is far better, and safer, to see in Adam’s chosen name for his wife a statement of encouragement as to the future: he and his wife would not die, and the human race of which he was the head and founder, would not perish on account of his sin. Whether Adam ever made that hope the saving content of his faith, only God knows.

*The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.* (3:21)

This verse is self-explanatory – God replaced the loincloths of leaves that Adam and Eve had fashioned for themselves, with clothing of animal skin. On the face of it, this provided them with more durable covering, perhaps in anticipation of their expulsion from the Garden and the consequent exposure to the elements that they would now face. However, as with the previous verse, so also with this one: commentators want to read *behind* the words to find hidden meaning. In verse 20 that hidden meaning pertained to the alleged faith of Adam; here it pertains to the institution of animal sacrifice. It is evidently the case that some animals gave up their lives so that the man and woman could be thus clothed, and many evangelical writers see in this the first evidence of the ritual of blood sacrifice as atonement for sin.

The logic that is usually followed is very succinctly put by Andrew Fuller.

By the means wherewith the Lord God clothed them, it seems to be implied that animals were slain, and as they were not at that time slain for food, it is highly

probably that they were slain for sacrifice, especially as this practice is mentioned in the life of Abel.<sup>62</sup>

Again Matthew Henry sees an allusion to the supreme sacrifice of Jesus Christ in this act of God in clothing the first couple. "The beasts, from whose skins they were clothed, it is supposed were slain, not for man's food, but for sacrifice, to typify Christ, the great Sacrifice."<sup>63</sup> But so important an issue as atoning sacrifice – especially to the author, Moses, writing as he did under the shadow of Sinai – would reasonably have been introduced in a far clearer manner than this. No mention is made whatsoever that the animals were slain – as we reasonably assume that they were – for any other reason than for their pelts. It is hard to satisfy one's curiosity with the mere simplicity that God had a care for His image, Man, and provided for him the necessary protection from those external dangers to which his sin had now made him susceptible.

A more common interpretation among the Reformers and their immediate disciples has to do not with atoning sacrifice, but rather with what was considered 'appropriate' dress versus 'extravagant' dress. Calvin pontificates,

In the meantime, it is not to be denied, that he would propose to us an example, by which he would accustom us to a frugal and unexpensive mode of dress. And I wish those delicate persons would reflect on this, who deem no ornament sufficiently attractive, unless it exceed in magnificence.<sup>64</sup>

Apparently extravagant dress was a problem during the Reformation, for Luther echoes Calvin's remarks (actually, Luther's comments probably preceded Calvin's). "On this point also the world had become utterly foolish, for who can fitly describe how much care and cost people now spend on clothing!"<sup>65</sup> One wonders what Luther and Calvin would say today, considering that the epitome of extravagance in wardrobe consists in *animal furs*.

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<sup>62</sup> Fuller; 17.

<sup>63</sup> Henry, Matthew; *en loc.*

<sup>64</sup> Calvin; 182.

<sup>65</sup> Luther; 86.



*Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"* (3:22)

A remarkable number of commentators see irony in the Lord's words in this verse, as if He were mocking man's pretension to be *as God* through the eating of the forbidden fruit. But there is no indication of irony in the divine words; rather, it is an admission that Man had indeed achieved something of a 'promotion' in knowledge - an elevation in thought through this new experiential knowledge of 'good and evil.' We can be assured that God is not admitting Man to the ranks of the divine; that would be impossible for any creature whose beginning is of Time and not Eternity. But it is also important for the student of biblical anthropology to realize that the Fall did not reduce mankind to the cognitive level of animals. Instead, it did in some manner intensify man's mind, and it brought into the realm of human thought vistas that, no doubt, God would in time have exposed to His greatest creature upon terms of submission and obedience. This passage is of the same kind, and in anticipation of, what the Lord God found to be true of Man in a more progressive state of civilization - at the Tower of Babel.

*And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. And the Lord said, 'Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them.'* (Genesis 11:5-6)

The intent of this verse in Genesis 3 is not to lather divine irony and contempt upon man for his presumption. It is, rather, a marvelous display of divine grace permeating divine wrath. The key point of the verse is the second clause; the first - that man had become 'like one of Us' - is a given.<sup>66</sup> Thus we

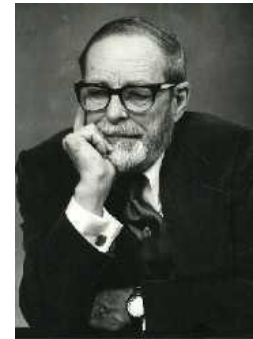
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<sup>66</sup> The use of the first person plural pronoun here is, like elsewhere in Genesis, most naturally to be interpreted as introducing the concept of a plurality within the Godhead. There is, as in Genesis 1:26, no sound reason to incorporate the angelic host into a consortium with God. It may be that the doctrine of the

ought to focus on the concern that God's words betray, *"lest he stretch out his hand, and take also from the Tree of Life, and eat, and live forever."*

What is at stake here is the 'redemptability' of Man, for if he had rendered himself immortal by eating of the Tree of Life, he would have also rendered himself - like the angels - beyond the reach of redemption. He would have confirmed himself in sin, for physical death - though it is the wages of sin - is also a release from sin's progressive corruption of human nature. Contained in the Lord's words in this verse there is an incredibly profound analysis of the 'blessing' of death as the consequence of sin. It is amazing that a commentator as skilled and conservative as John Calvin would essentially deny the content of what the Lord God actually says in this verse, "It is indeed certain, that man would not have been able, had he even devoured the whole tree, to enjoy life against the will of God..." But the straightforward interpretation of the verse yields a more reasonable and powerful conclusion.

That is, that the possibility existed for Man to, in a sense, 'confirm' himself in his fallenness, and thus immortalize his sin. What is being introduced here is the phenomenon of man securing himself in immortality while still in sin, a situation that one commentator attributes to the essence of hell. Arthur Custance writes, "But once they had disobeyed and destroyed by a single act of disobedience both their spiritual vitality as well as their physical immortality, the healing of the body could only have consigned them to an unending existence with a fallen nature."<sup>67</sup>



Arthur Custance (1910-85)

The denial to Man of the fruit of the Tree of Life is undoubtedly a punishment. Or, better stated, a component of the divine punishment for Man's transgression. Yet this particular aspect of the punishment had shades of grace,

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Trinity is not to be found explicitly in such verses, but only prejudice prevents one from seeing plurality in the Godhead.

<sup>67</sup> Custance, Arthur *The Seed of Woman* (Brockville, Ontario: Doorway Publications; 1980); 90.

illustrating in practice Habakkuk's heartfelt prayer, '*in wrath, remember mercy.*'<sup>68</sup> "The expulsion from paradise, was a punishment inflicted for man's good, intended, while exposing him to temporal death, to preserve him from eternal death."<sup>69</sup> Man, as von Rad correctly analyzes, continues to yearn for immortality. How could he not, now that his eyes are opened through a self-directed attempt to be like God?

Rather, we are to see that just the man, bowed so deeply by God's punishment, languishes unabatedly for immortality; and we are also to learn that the severe denial of eternal life also has a merciful reverse side, namely, the withholding of a good which for man would have been unbearable in his present condition.<sup>70</sup>

This discussion brings us back to Anselm's formula, "You have not yet considered the weight of sin." We shall see lived out the truth that sin is an unending cancer that corrupts the morals as well as the soul of men; the longer they live, the more wicked they become. There is no asymptotic maximum of wickedness to which man approaches by lesser increments over time. Rather the trend is hyperbolic - man's wickedness increases exponentially as he ages, it does not slow down and most certainly does not diminish. To be confirmed in this trajectory through immortality would be exceedingly tragic both for individual men and for the human race. "For immortality in a state of sin is not the *life eternal*, which God designed for man, but endless misery, which the Scriptures call 'the second death.'"<sup>71</sup> The centuries leading up the Deluge serve as the inspired historical illustration of just what happens to fallen man when his days on earth are prolonged. That they should be without number is unthinkable both to man as well as to God.

In like manner to the granting of intelligence, which was always the intention of God toward His supreme creation - Man, so also it was always the

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<sup>68</sup> Habakkuk 3:2

<sup>69</sup> Keil & Delitzsch; 107.

<sup>70</sup> Von Rad; 97.

<sup>71</sup> Keil & Delitzsch; 107.

divine purpose to grant to Man eternal life. But, like wisdom and understanding, eternal life was to come in accordance with and submission to God's will, not by the will of man himself. At the other end of the redemptive historical spectrum the Tree of Life reappears, clearly set in the context of Genesis 3, though with all things reversed and restored.

*Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him...*

(Revelation 22:1-3)

*"...therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life."* (3:23-24)

In verse 23 the story of Adam comes full circle and to a close; what is to be said concerning Adam subsequently has more to do with his offspring than with the first man himself. The literary thread that runs through the Adamic story is the word translated here as 'ground,' and draws our thoughts back to the beginning of the pericope: Genesis 2:7. The Hebrew word is *ademe*, which is transliterated as 'adam.' Three places this word occurs in the Adamic narrative, marking the three stages of the first man's life path. The trajectory of the first man's life is parabolic: created perfect and good, in the image of Almighty God, he started well. His upward movement, however, slowed as the gravity of temptation weighed down upon his mind and will until, overcome by ambition, he transgressed the sole prohibition limiting his idyllic life. That was man's life at its apex; everything else is downhill until he returns to the ground from which he came. Adam's occupation was to be a farmer, to till the ground perhaps as a daily reminder of whence he came, and where he was going.

**The Creation (2:7)**

*"...and the Lord God formed Man from the dust (opher)*

*of the ground (ademe)."*

**The Curse (3:19)**      *"...till you return to the ground (ademe)...for you are dust (opher) and to dust (opher) you shall return.*

**The Consequence (3:23)**      *"...to cultivate the ground (ademe) from which he was taken."*

Man is cast from the Garden both as punishment and as protection. His way back to Eden is then barred by the placement of *cherubim* – plural – at the entrance to the Garden, associated with a flaming sword whose constant and comprehensive motion gives the reader the sense of absolute security against re-entry. Much ink has been spilled in discussion regarding the identity of the cherubim, though Moses gives none. It is apparent that whatever these creatures were – and they are only mentioned a few times in Scripture – the Israelite nation already had a notion of their being at the time of Sinai and the writing of the Pentateuch. Far more important is the symbolism contained in the tapestries of the tabernacle, showing the abiding separation that exists between fallen man and a holy God. As the cherubim guarded paradise so that Man could not return, so also the image of cherubim would guard the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle, to prohibit unlawful entry into the presence of God.

*You shall make a veil of blue and purple and scarlet material and fine twisted linen; **it shall be made with cherubim**, the work of a skillful workman. You shall hang it on four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold, their hooks also being of gold, on four sockets of silver. You shall hang up the veil under the clasps, and shall bring in the ark of the testimony there within the veil; and the veil shall serve for you as a partition between the holy place and the holy of holies. You shall put the mercy seat on the ark of the testimony in the holy of holies.* (Exodus 26:31-34)

Solomon took the imagery a step farther in luxuriousness, as his temple was more luxurious than the tabernacle in the wilderness. Olive wood statues of cherubim were made to guard the various places in the sanctuary, most notably the ark of the covenant, and cherubim were engraved in the gold overleaf on the interior doors of the Holy Place. (I Kings 6:23ff) The significance of the tabernacle

and temple artwork is obviously to serve as a reminder of this passage in Genesis 3, and to reinforce in the minds of God's people the impossibility of ever approaching God again on the basis of mere creation. The 'Fatherhood of God' has been irretrievably lost; the 'Brotherhood of Man' is soon to be shown to be a poetic travesty.

*"Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, "I have gotten a manchild with the help of the LORD." (4:1)*

We end this section of our study with the same verse with which we will begin our next lesson, for the opening verse of Chapter 4 is universally recognized as transitional. We are here on the cusp of the operating title of this study: The Rise and Progress of Sin. Chapter 3 presents us with sin's *Rise*; Chapter 4 commences with its *Progress*. In the middle is the birth of Adam and Eve's first son, Cain.

The main reason to introduce this verse at the close of an analysis of Chapter 3 is to revisit by way of example the previously discussed tendency among evangelical scholars to find 'salvation' in events and statements of biblical antiquity, that may not justify the happy conclusion. As Adam's naming of his wife in Chapter 3 is often seen as a manifestation of redemptive faith in our first father, so Eve's comment on the birth of her first son is likewise viewed as proof of her regeneration. In this case the Hebrew of the statement uttered by Eve does not help at all.

Her comment, *"I have gotten a manchild with the help of the Lord"* as it is rendered by the New American Standard, is itself as much an interpretation as it is a translation. The connection between 'manchild' and 'Lord' is problematic at best, and the more cautious commentators allow that it could mean that the Lord assisted or blessed Eve with a child, or it could mean that Eve thought the child to *be* the Lord. In addition, the name of the Lord used here is *Jehovah* (Hebrew *YHWH*), which is the covenant name of God thus far not used in the narrative.

C. F. Keil believes that this alone is sufficient to manifest saving faith on the part of Eve.

That she sees in the birth of this son the commencement of the fulfillment of the promise, and thankfully acknowledges the divine help in this display of mercy, is evident from the name *Jehovah*, the God of salvation.<sup>72</sup>

The problem with the phrasing revolves around the particle (*eth τα*) that appears in the Hebrew just prior to *Jehovah*. It is an uncommon one, and nowhere else signifies *with* as in *assistance*. Nor does it mean *from* as in *source* or *blessing*. It is for these reasons that some translators have simply rendered the phrase, “*I have gotten a manchild, the Lord*” and have concluded that Eve was fully aware of the Messianic and divine implications of the Seed promise from the previous chapter. It is also quite odd that she should refer to her infant son as a ‘manchild,’ literally not a child at all, but rather an *ish* – a man. Calvin believes that this unusual reference to a male infant as a ‘man’ is to be interpreted as Eve’s understanding Cain to be the renewal of the human race, which the first *ish* – Adam – plunged into potential catastrophe by his sin.

The sequel will, of course, disabuse both Adam and Eve of any notion that Cain would be the ‘promised one’ who would bruise the serpent’s head, and thus it is to be noted that Eve’s statement was by no means prophetic. Still, the phrasing and word usage is challenging, and may indicate faith on the part of Eve. It almost certainly indicates a deeper understanding – or at least an intellectual orientation toward – the substantive content of the Seed promise of 3:15. Calvin’s interpretation is typically cautious, and probably the best we can do with the text. “...that Eve gives thanks to God for having begun to raise up a posterity through her, though she was deserving of perpetual barrenness, as well as of utter destruction.”<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Keil & Delitzsch; 108.

<sup>73</sup> Calvin; 190.

**Summary of the Fall Narrative:**

Liberal scholarship within professing Christianity has so thoroughly taken the field of Old Testament study, that even many evangelical commentators now agree that the narrative of the Fall is an amalgamation of Ancient Near Eastern (primarily Babylonian) myths. However, one of these liberal scholars, Gerhard von Rad, betrays the academic conundrum facing all such denigrations of the Mosaic text (though von Rad, in keeping with the liberal school, does not believe that Moses was the author of Genesis). The Lutheran Old Testament expert gives a summary of the Fall narrative in which he essentially refutes the critical view he himself espouses: there is no evidence of mythology, Babylonian or otherwise, in the narrative of Genesis Chapter 3.

The narrator does not reply to many impertinent questions because his own standpoint, of course, is not within Paradise but outside it, and he refrains from all fantasy and speculation about what existed before the Fall. In this respect the reticence, indeed soberness and calm, of the biblical story is especially noticeable in contrast to the arrogant and harsh colors in the myths of other peoples. The culmination of the story is not far away, in the past, but in life after the time of Paradise: the wife, father, mother, the animals, the soil, tribulation, childbirth. Nowhere does the narrator give way to describing an earlier mythological world, even in ch. 2; for what is said about the rivers of Paradise, the creation of man out of the earth, the creation of the beasts, of the woman and her fate – all those things are creative acts and decrees that have the same validity for post-Paradise man. The narrator does not give a *direct*, positive description of conditions of life in Paradise. He limits himself to pointing out the great disorders of our present life – shame, fear, the dissonances in the life of the woman and the man – and ascribing them to human sin. And this, of course, is the chief concern of the entire narrative.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Von Rad; 100-101.



**Week 5: Cain & Abel: The Conflict Begins****Text Reading: Genesis 4:1 - 15**

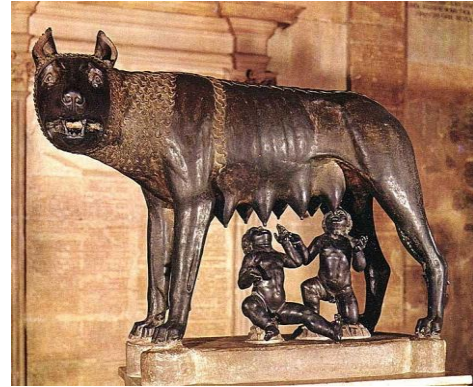
*"The conflict of the ages begins."*

(J. Cynddylan Jones)

FOGBOM – the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man. It is popular among ecumenicists, universalists, and liberal denominationalists to advocate a unity of mankind both with respect to the Creator and to one another. We all have one Father, and we are all brothers. As with the best of lies, this one contains just enough truth to be deceitful and dangerous. Evangelical Christianity staunchly maintains the unity of the human race as coming from one man, himself the creation of the one, true God. Thus Luke can trace the lineage of Jesus Christ not merely to the patriarch Abraham, as Matthew does, but to *"Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God."* But we have seen that the 'fatherhood' of God, while true in one sense, is manifestly not true in another. Two lines of humanity were drawn in distinction to one another in Genesis 3:15, where the 'seed of the Woman' will develop alongside and in contention with the 'seed of the Serpent' throughout human history. Thus one important thread of biblical as well as secular history: God is not the Father of all men in the same way.

As for the 'brotherhood of man,' the narrative before us here in Genesis 4 pretty much speaks for itself in regard to just how 'brotherly' man has been to his fellow man. The first pair of brothers ends up in fratricide, setting a pattern of internecine warfare within the race that exceeds in violence and carnage anything witnessed in the animal world. Indeed, the animosity and murder that persists *among brothers* forms a central theme within the Bible as well as within human history. From Scripture we immediately think of Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob, and Absalom and Amnon, just to name three examples. Within secular 'history' there are many examples that roughly parallel the story of Cain and Abel.

One of the best known among these secular fraternal feuds is that between Romulus and Remus, the legendary founders of Rome. Descendants of Aeneas, the fugitive hero from Troy, and allegedly the sons of Mars, the war-god, these twin boys were destined to rule the burgeoning Roman



society growing up along the Tiber River in central Italy. That is, unless their usurping great-uncle Amulius killed them first. However, Amulius was unwilling to offend Mars, so he ordered that the infant boys be exposed, reasoning that he could hardly be blamed for their death by nature. In a manner remarkably similar to another, familiar biblical narrative, the boys were floated down the river in a basket. They were discovered by a she-wolf who suckled them, and were fed by a woodpecker until taken in by a shepherd and his wife, who raised them to manhood.

For many years the brothers acted in concert the various stages of their life, from hunting and shepherding their 'father's' flocks, to overthrowing their wicked uncle Amulius. Ambition took hold of them both with the desire to build a city near the site where they were exposed as infants, the site which was to become Rome. Disagreement set in over which of the seven famous hills on which Rome now sits would be the origin of the city. Romulus built a wall between his camp and that of his brother Remus, who then contemptuously jumped over the wall, only to be killed by his brother. Thus Rome was built on fratricide, and would prove devoted to this ancestral characteristic.

While there are similarities between the legend of Romulus and Remus and the narrative of Cain and Abel, there are also striking differences. In a manner noted by von Rad and recorded at the end of the previous lesson, the story of Cain and Abel is devoid of any fantastical aspects - there is no abandonment at birth, no suckling she-wolf, no nourishing woodpecker - just

two male children of the first parents. In addition, at least in the initial narrative, there is no manifest political ambition to be found in either man's breast, only a bitterness nurtured in the heart of one because of the divine favor accorded to the other.<sup>75</sup> And of course, the sequel to the story of Cain and Abel is profoundly different than that of Romulus and Remus. In the biblical narrative the murderer is not favored by God but rather is cast out from the divine Presence. Still, it is worth noting that the first recorded act of Cain upon exile was to build a city and to call the name of it Enoch, after his own son. This, within the culture of the Ancient Near East, was a way of honoring himself through his son, whereas to call the city after his own name would, in fact, honor Adam his father.

The founding of Rome is traditionally set in the 8<sup>th</sup> Century BC (the most common date given is 753 BC), so there is no one who alleges that the biblical narrative 'borrowed' from the Roman legend. But the story of the founding of Rome is just one of a fair number of 'brother stories' that permeate ancient literature. One explanation of this phenomenon, favored by liberal scholarship, is that of borrowing. Another, equally (if not more) reasonable and rational, is that of common descent. The borrowing of stories fails to explain the origin of the motif to begin with – Why brothers? Why so often *twin* brothers? Why the prevalence of fratricide? The 'common descent' theory offers one original narrative – the meta-narrative – from which all of the others descend with varying degrees of integrity or corruption.

For the evangelical, the presence of so many other 'brother' stories in ancient literature does not negatively impact the historicity of the Cain/Abel narrative in the least. Indeed, if anything these other stories serve to confirm an original narrative that settled the thought of primeval fratricide in the minds of all ancient cultures – in the same way we will see the reality of a Deluge set the

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<sup>75</sup> It is interesting to note, however, that in Livy's narrative of Romulus and Remus there was a competition between the brothers concerning divine auguries, manifested by the appearances of vultures to each brother – to Remus first, but then to Romulus with double the number of birds. Thus their feud was not devoid of religious overtones.

memory of it within the minds of antiquity. And again, the simplicity and straightforward nature of the biblical account – the complete absence of the truly unbelievable – argues strongly in favor of it being the truest to the original, as indeed we believe it to be the original itself.

But the student of Genesis must admit that this simplicity, while refreshing and honorable, comes at a price to interpretation. Frankly, Moses' narrative of the events is very terse – as if he were writing for Sergeant Joe Friday, "Just the facts, m'am." There are, however, quite a number of 'facts' that



**Tremper Longman (b. 1952)**

the reader of Genesis could wish Moses had included. Tremper Longman, a noted Old Testament scholar, writes, "A reading of Genesis will raise many questions in our minds that are not quickly and easily resolved. Indeed, a number of questions remain unanswered even after intensive study."<sup>76</sup> This fact

must be recognized, as well as the reality that the 'fill-in' of the gaps made necessary by the lack of detail requires a great deal of caution and restraint. Longman continues, "We should be prepared to recognize when our interpretations are certain, merely probable, or even tenuous."<sup>77</sup> We shall see that this cautionary note has not always – perhaps not often – been followed by biblical commentators in their handling of Genesis Chapter 4. Moses has left a fair number of gaps to be filled, and subsequent divine revelation aids us in filling some of them, reasonable conjecture fills a few more, and interpretive imagination fills the rest.

But before the gap filling begins, it is perhaps worthwhile to summarize the gist of the narrative up front, lest the forest get lost on account of the trees. Genesis Chapter 4 is the beginning of the historical exposition of Genesis 3:15, in particular the enmity between the seed of the Woman and the seed of the

<sup>76</sup> Longman, Tremper *How to Read Genesis* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic; 2005); 20.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*; 34.

Serpent. One generation was all that was needed for the division within the human race to manifest itself, and for the “conflict of the ages to begin.”<sup>78</sup>

*Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, “I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.” Again, she gave birth to his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. (4:1-2)*

Cain and Abel, believed to be Adam and Eve’s first two sons. Their respective names are given here in the opening verses of Chapter 4, though throughout the subsequent narrative Abel is more often referred to as Cain’s brother rather than by name. The name ‘Cain’ derives from the Hebrew word which means to acquire (*qayin*), though the derivation is somewhat stretched and tenuous. The name ‘Abel,’ however, is much easier to interpret as it is the Hebrew word *hebel* or *hevel*, which means ‘vanity’ or ‘futility.’ Literally it is a fleeting vapor, a ephemeral transient. “As found in Hebrew, it means nothingness, and is the expression of disappointed hope, whether as declaring the vanity, the nothingness of human life in general apart from God and His promise, or the nothingness of this man whose life was to last but a breath.”<sup>79</sup> Thus some commentators believe the name reflects the fleeting nature of man’s life in general (though this does not seem applicable to the antediluvians, as they tended to live close to a thousand years). More likely it has reference to the fleeting life of Abel himself, who was, of course, killed by his brother. Since the text does not explicitly state that either Adam or Eve *named* their second son *hevel* (Abel), it is reasonable to conclude with many conservative interpreters, both Christian and Jewish, that this particular name was given to him posthumously.

A few commentators, John Calvin most notable among them, believe Cain and Abel were twins on account of the fact that the standard introductory clause, “*And Adam knew his wife...*” is missing before the announcement of Abel. If the two boys were twins, the narrative would anticipate the more theologically

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<sup>78</sup> Jones, J. Cynddylan *Primeval Revelation* (London: Hodder and Stoughton; 1897); 307.

<sup>79</sup> Delitzsch, Franz *A New Commentary on Genesis; Volume I* (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock; 1978); 179.

charged division between Esau and Jacob, the sons of Rebekah, several millennia on in redemptive history. In addition, the sin of fratricide described in the Genesis narrative becomes even more heinous if the two were twins, born not only of the same womb but also conceived at the same time.<sup>80</sup>

The record states the occupation of the two sons, indicating that the timing of the events has them at least in young manhood, if not already married and on their own (a reasonable speculation). Cain's occupation is that of his father – a tiller of the ground, while Abel is a herder of livestock. Both occupations are perfectly legitimate and necessary to human society, but it has been appropriately noted that they have also customarily been at odds with one another. Later in the Genesis account we will learn that the Egyptians, who were tillers of the ground, despised shepherds, of which guild Jacob's family were generational members. The animosity between farmers and herders has persisted well into the modern era, and was humorously set to music in the Rodgers & Hammerstein production, *Oklahoma!* The hostility between the two occupations was somewhat notorious in the American West, but the more peace-minded folk tried to get the farmer and the cowman to be friends,

The farmer and the cowman should be friends.

Oh, the farmer and the cowman should be friends.

One man likes to push a plough, the other likes to chase a cow,

But that's no reason why they cain't be friends...

(“The Farmer and the Cowman Should Be Friends”; stanza 1)

Here is one of those places where Moses leaves gaps for the reader to fill in. The most reasonable conclusion as to why the occupation of the two sons is mentioned is in anticipation of their respective offerings, to be immediately discussed and indeed, the central theme of the narrative. But as the underlying theme of division and animosity within the descendants of Adam and Eve is only slightly in the background here, it is not unreasonable to see the later shades

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<sup>80</sup> Calvin, *en loc* Genesis 4:1.

of animosity between farmers and herdsman, an animosity that is both present in the pages of sacred history as well as written across millennia of human society.

*So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions.* (4:3-4a)

With these verses the interpretive conjecture kicks into high gear. Once again the overall gist of the passage is clear: both Cain and Abel brought an offering (Hebrew *mincha*, frequently used in the Mosaic legislation, though almost always referring to the *bloodless* offerings) to the Lord. We are also told somewhat regarding each man's offering: Cain's was vegetable, Abel's was meat. In later Levitical terminology, Cain's was a bloodless thank- or peace-offering, whereas Abel's was a sin- or burnt-offering, though it is a topic of much debate whether later Levitical terminology may justly be applied to this event. The narrative is almost painfully terse, and generates more questions than it answers. The reader's natural inquisitiveness wants to know *when* this offering took place; we are told *in the course of time*. It wants to know *where* the altar was set; we are told nothing. It wants to know *how* the men knew that they were to bring sacrifices to the Lord, and *whether* they knew just what sort of offerings were expected of them; again, we are told nothing.

The *when* question comes to the fore immediately upon reading verse 3, "*in the course of time*," indicating a specific period of time having elapsed. Literally the phrase should be rendered "*at the end of days*," though this does not help us determine just how many days are referenced. It is popular among Reformed commentators to see an allusion to the weekly Sabbath here, but the phrase in the Hebrew elsewhere implies a lengthy passage of time<sup>81</sup> and the plural of 'days' is often used in the Hebrew scriptures to indicate years.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Delitzsch; *Commentary*; 180.

<sup>82</sup> Ainsworth, Henry *Annotations on the Pentateuch and the Psalms: Volume 1* (Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications; 1991); 27.

Again, if Moses had intended the reader to understand this service of sacrifice to be an observance of the Sabbath, it would have been quite reasonable for him to mention it explicitly rather than obliquely. The same logic pertains here as in the discussion as to whether God 'sacrificed' the animals whose skins were used to cloth Adam and Eve. Sacrifice and Sabbath were integral parts of the Mosaic dispensation from Mt. Sinai; if the shades of later practice were to be found in this primeval history, one would have expected Moses to spell it out clearly. This is, of course, an argument from silence. One cannot prove that Moses was not referring to the Sabbath simply on the basis of his not mentioning it. However, the practice of the cultures of the Ancient Near East probably give us a better handle on the interpretation of the timing of this event in Genesis 4:3; better than the much later institutions of Sinai. It is likely that this was a harvest festival of some sort, or a New Year's festival - the two most common and universal times of religious gathering and sacrifice among the various peoples of the ancient world. Given the subsequent description of the two men's offerings, it would seem to have been an event commemorating the harvest. If this is the case, the *why* of the offerings would also be answered - these were offerings of thanksgiving for a successful harvest - and would explain why each man brought to the Lord an offering from his own vocation.

*Where* this event took place is also left undefined, though it is implied that both men brought their offerings at the same time, to the same place. Given no clear statement about the venue, most commentators opt for the barred gateway to Eden as the place where God was still to be met, and where sacrifices were to be made. This fits in with both the practices of ancient cultures - to offer sacrifices to a god *in his presence* at a temple of some sort - and with the fact that the later tabernacle would have the cherubim woven into the veil that guarded the sanctuary. This is, of course, conjecture; but it stands to reason. To be sure, the ancient rabbinic teaching on this point has the sacrifices of Cain and Abel being offered at the same place where Abraham offered Isaac, and where David



offered on the threshing floor of Ornan, and where David's son Solomon built the Temple.<sup>83</sup>

*And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard.* (4:4b-5a)

With this simple sentence we come to the crux of the matter: Abel's offering was accepted by the Lord, Cain's was not. Once again the terseness of the sentence, while conveying the essential point, leaves so much almost painfully unanswered. One question that frequently arises has to do with just *how* God manifested His approval of one offering over the other. Some commentators reason that this approval appears later, with greater blessing bestowed on Abel's labors than on Cain's. But it is fairly evident from the text that the approbation and disapprobation both occur at the time of the sacrifices. The biblically logical answer to this question is that the divine approval was manifested by fire appearing and consuming Abel's offering, while leaving Cain's untouched. "It is a common and ancient opinion that fire consumed Abel's sacrifice, and thus showed that it was graciously accepted."<sup>84</sup> Ainsworth writes, "It is likely therefore that God showed it by some visible sign, as by fire from heaven consuming the sacrifice, for so he used to do in such cases after...and the burning of the sacrifice to ashes was a sign of his favourable acceptance."<sup>85</sup>

The most significant unanswered point, of course, has to do with *why* the Lord regarded Abel's offering and not Cain's. From Moses we have only silence. The author to the Hebrews, some fourteen centuries later, provides us with an answer at last,

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<sup>83</sup> Recorded by Ainsworth; 27.

<sup>84</sup> Keil & Delitzsch; 110.

<sup>85</sup> Ainsworth; 28.

*By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts...* (Hebrews 11:4)

Yet even this explanation does not answer our natural curiosity as to what it was about Abel's offering that met with the divine approbation. Several commentators protest that there is nothing to be found within the sacrifices themselves that would indicate one's meeting with divine approval versus the other. Delitzsch emphatically denies anything intrinsic to the two offerings, writing, "It is not however the gifts themselves in their externalism, but the inward disposition of the persons therein manifested, which determines the conduct of God."<sup>86</sup> Delitzsch, and others, reasonably base such comments on the order that Moses gives to the divine approbation: first *Abel* is accepted, and then his offering; and it is *Cain* to whom God has no regard, and then his offering. This order also corresponds with the inspired commentary on the passage from Hebrews 4; it was Abel who offered *by faith* and thus obtained the testimony of God.

Nevertheless, since we are told what it was that the two men brought as offerings before the Lord, it is reasonable to expect the manifestation of the faith of one, and the lack of faith of the other, to be contained in some respect in that which they offered. Some have asserted that *both* men brought vegetable offerings, while only Abel brought a meat offering as well. This may be indicated in the fact that both sacrifices are called *mincha* in clauses 4b and 5a – a word that is almost exclusively used to describe *bloodless* offerings of vegetable or meal. "Cain and Abel equally brought a *mincha* – a bread offering."<sup>87</sup> This offering was intended as a thank- or praise-offering rather than a sin- or burnt-offering. In other words, the *mincha* was an offering that presupposed atonement and was predicated upon the worshiper having obtained peace with God. Thus, it is reasoned, it was Abel's additional gift of a bleeding, atonement sacrifice that

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<sup>86</sup> Delitzsch; 181.

<sup>87</sup> Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown; 68.

made the difference – or, better stated, manifested the difference between the two men’s hearts in regard to *faith*. “Abel brought a burnt-offering, thereby confessing his sinfulness, acknowledging the just forfeiture of his life, and that forgiveness was possible only through the surrender of a substitutionary life.”<sup>88</sup>

This interpretation is considered by some to be anachronistic; to read the principles of Mosaic legislation back into the offerings of Cain and Abel. Another view takes its point of departure by asserting that Abel alone offered the *firstfruits*, whereas Cain apparently offered merely *of the fruit of the ground*, without any reference to its being the firstfruits. Thus the distinction between the two men lies in the value each placed upon the offering he was bringing before the Lord: Abel was concerned to bring the very best; Cain content to bring whatever came to hand. Still others argue that Cain could not have brought a meat offering, since he was a farmer – though this contention is patently weak: Cain could have bartered vegetables for a lamb, as it was almost certainly the case that the whole of the first family partook of both the fruit of the ground and the benefits of the flock. These divergent interpretations read into the passage – they all must, seeing that the passage itself does not clarify the matter. What is to serve as a criteria of merit among them?

Though it may appear to be anachronistic to argue in terms of the type of sacrifice – blood versus bloodless – it is not so in reality. This is because the nature of God is unchangeable and, though the revelation of that nature in written form did indeed come many generations after these events, that which is pleasing in God’s sight has never changed. Just as it is faith in the heart that meets with divine approval, so also that faith is manifested in the understanding of self-condemnation and the need for atonement. The very fact that Cain and Abel were bringing offerings is an acknowledgement of the divine Being and of Man’s obligation before Him. The nature of this obligation can never be acceptable to a holy God when it is viewed apart from the inherent sin of the

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<sup>88</sup> Jones, J. Cynddylan; 313.

worshiper. The phrase *“apart from the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins”* may not have been written down until Leviticus 17, but it most certainly has governed all right approach to God since Man’s first fall. Thus Abel’s faith is revealed through his own seeking of atonement through a blood offering; Cain, on the other hand, makes no such statement with his offering.

Cain’s offering, on the other hand, was an act of will-worship, indicating no confession of sin or contrition for it, marked by an arbitrary pride of self-righteousness, a presumptuous disregard of the hope as well as of the necessity of an atonement...In short, Cain exhibited the first example of an unbeliever, who rejected all light but that of his own reason, confided in the general benignity and goodness of the Divine character, and flattered himself that in offering a portion of his property as a token of his gratitude for all he possessed, the tribute would be accepted, of whatever quantity it consisted, or in whatever form it was rendered.<sup>89</sup>

The description of Cain’s response would certainly seem to bear out this description of his nature, and of the crime of his sacrifice. *“The sacrifices of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord.”*<sup>90</sup>

*So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell. Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.”* (4:5b-7)

Martin Luther offers one of the most amazing statements of any commentary on this passage, assigning the voice of Cain’s rebuke not to God, but to Adam. *“When Cain constantly showed that his heart was alienated from his brother, he was admonished by his father Adam, for I believe that these words were spoken through Adam.”*<sup>91</sup> Luther was not here denying the possibility of God speaking with man, but rather he was allowing his very noble views on the role of the father to massively affect his interpretation of Scripture. Indeed, the

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<sup>89</sup> Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown; 69.

<sup>90</sup> Prov. 15:8

<sup>91</sup> Luther; 98.

rebuke of a son ought to come from the father; but so often – and especially so in the biblical narratives – the father neglects to perform this vital duty. We have not heard from Adam since his lame excuse given after his sin, and we will not hear from him again (we hear of him, but not from him). It is far more reasonable to conclude, with Jamieson, Faussett, and Brown, that “the Divine Being continued for a considerable time after the fall to maintain a condescending and familiar intercourse in visible form with the primeval family.”<sup>92</sup>

The central part of this passage is, unfortunately, one in which the Hebrew is extremely difficult to translate. Space will not allow even a summary of the various attempts to translate, and then interpret, the words with which the Lord counsels and rebukes Cain. The rendering of the New American Standard version, given above, has at least enough support from both Jewish and Christian scholars through the centuries to bear retention, and we will work from it. The key phrase is the one referring to *sin crouching*; as we have seen in Chapter 3, this is the same phrasing that is used with regard to Eve’s relationship to Adam. Thus the interpretation here ought to correspond with the interpretation there.

The first part of the phrase is simple enough: God asks Cain why his countenance (Hebrew *panim*; literally ‘faces’) has fallen. As it is Cain’s countenance that has fallen, it stands to reason that this is what will ‘rise’ or be ‘lifted up’ if he only does that which is good. The problem is not with Abel, and most certainly it is not with God; the problem is with and within Cain; that is the message the Lord is bringing to this wayward man. The challenge the Lord presents to Cain does indicate something on the order of ‘free will,’ and this passage has often been used in defense of the position that man is *able* to conquer sin in his own heart, because he is *responsible* to do so. However, there are too many solid indications in Scripture of the solid *inability* of man to do that which is good in the sight of God, due to man’s ‘freewill’ decision to sin in Adam, to

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<sup>92</sup> Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown; 68.

erect a different criteria for salvation here with Cain. It is a more consistent interpretation to see that the Lord is speaking directly to Cain's conscience, and to the fact that Cain's current state of depressive anger is due to a guilty conscience, one that is not right and clean before the Lord. Cain's ethical predicament is described by the Apostle Paul as such as is common to all mankind, even those who were outside the covenant community and blessings of Jehovah.

*For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.* (Romans 2:14-16)

Cain's conscience was accusing him, and God warns him to heed his conscience and to repent. This, of course, is something that Cain is as unwilling to do as he is unable. The Lord's description of sin 'crouching' at the door – perhaps the door of Cain's heart, or perhaps a more homely metaphor, "*the tent flap,*" indicates "sin as an objective power which, as it were, is outside the man and over him, waiting eagerly to take possession of him."<sup>93</sup> From a theological standpoint, we see here that man's responsibility to control sin in his members is in no way diminished on account of his sin. Sin may, and undoubtedly does, render man more insensitive to sin and incapable of controlling it, but it cannot diminish the divine imperative to "*rule over it.*" Von Rad continues,

The man, however, ought to master it and curb it. Man's responsibility with regard to sin is not in the least annulled; on the contrary, this final imperative imposes on him the whole responsibility.<sup>94</sup>

Jehovah's interview (not Adam's) with Cain serves to put the man on notice that he is in a very serious place with respect to his own heart. Thus far

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<sup>93</sup> Von Rad; 105.

<sup>94</sup> *Idem.*

the sin in Cain was confined to himself, but as Delitzsch writes, “When man has once made room for evil within, there is but one step from inward to outward evil-doing; the sinful act crouches greedily like a beast of prey at the door of his heart till he shall step out and fall a victim to it.”<sup>95</sup> This is, of course, exactly what happened to Cain.

*Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. (4:8)*

The brevity of the narrative is astounding. Verse 8 opens with a sentence fragment, “Cain spoke with his brother...”, which is a better rendering of the Hebrew than in the NASV. It is unlikely that Cain told Abel what the Lord had said to him; rather more probable is that he spoke in outwardly friendly terms to his brother, drawing him innocently out from the crowd to a quiet place, with evil purposed in his heart toward Abel. This manner of behavior is often displayed in the biblical narratives – one thinks of Absalom speaking “neither good nor ill” toward his brother Amnon, though intending all the while to kill him. So also Joab enticed an unsuspecting Abner to a private interview, only to kill him in cold blood. The terseness of this passage in Genesis 4 serves to highlight the rapid descent that Cain has traveled, from fallen countenance to killing his brother. One commentator eloquently notes that “If the life of God had been within his reach, he would have killed him; but this he could not do.”<sup>96</sup> But Abel’s life was within Cain’s reach, and so he took it.

This act of murder, the first recorded, is presented as paradigmatic of the relationship between the seed of Woman and the seed of the Serpent. Peaceful coexistence would not be the norm, but rather enmity and jealousy often breaking out into murder and persecution, from the reprobate branch of the race against the redeemed. “The brothers were types of the two opposite classes of character which have ever since divided the world – the humble, believing, and

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<sup>95</sup> Delitzsch; 183.

<sup>96</sup> Fuller; 20.

pious servants of God, on the one hand, and the proud, self-willed, worldly-minded upholders of Rationalism and Infidelity on the other.”<sup>97</sup>

What lies behind this phenomenon is the natural and inevitable hatred that wells up within the heart of the sinner, tormented in his conscience yet unwilling and unable to repent, toward the One he knows to be a Holy God and



Charles Simeon (1759-1836)

just Judge. The corrupted *imago Dei* in the sinner cannot bear the presence of that image as it is being restored in the redeemed. Charles Simeon writes of Cain’s attitude toward his brother Abel – who it must be admitted was not to blame for Cain’s predicament – “Cain hated in him the divine image, as much as he envied him the divine favour.”<sup>98</sup> If God wanted a blood offering

from Cain, He would have it: *the blood of righteous Abel*.

*Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” And he said, “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” He said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to Me from the ground.”* (4:9-10)

The pattern of the Fall narrative is continued here, with the appearance of the Lord coming on the heels, as it were, of man’s sinful act. Notice also the similarity of questioning, with the subtle but powerful distinction: rather than “Where are you?” the question God puts to Cain is “Where is your brother?” In a much deeper sense than mere physical locality, God knew just where Cain was. Cain’s heart was sunk further into sin than was his father and mother’s at the time of their original fall, for though they sought to evade responsibility for their crime, they did not disown it as there son does here, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” It is as if Cain says, “Am I the shepherds’ shepherd?”<sup>99</sup>

<sup>97</sup> Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown; 70.

<sup>98</sup> Simeon, Charles *Expository Outlines on the Whole Bible: Volume I* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House; 1956); 48.

<sup>99</sup> Von Rad; 26.



The Lord's rejoinder is the first evidence we have of a recurring theme in Scripture, that Creation itself is both impacted by Man's sin and complicit in Man's judgment, "*the blood of your brother cries out from the ground.*" This sentence does not definitively show that Cain literally shed Abel's blood (he may have strangled his brother), for the connection between *blood* and *life* is strong from the very beginning of divine revelation. Although von Rad speaks of 'spilled blood,' what he says has application to any and all form of murder:

According to the Old Testament view, blood and life belong to God alone; whenever a man commits murder he attacks God's very own right of possession...Spilled blood cannot be shoveled underground; it cries aloud to heaven and complains directly to the Lord of life.<sup>100</sup>

It is interesting that the Hebrew in verse 10 is in the plural, *bloods*, rather than the singular as it is translated in the English. While it may be merely a Hebrew idiom, the plural of 'blood' is elsewhere associated directly with the sin of murder (Psalm 5:6, where the murderer is referred to as a '*man of bloods*'). Ainsworth references the Chaldee paraphrase as indicating the plural to mean "The voice of the bloods of the generations (the multitude of just men) which should have proceeded from thy brother."<sup>101</sup> This view not only has biblical support concerning the succeeding generations of a man being *in his loins*, as it were (*cp.* Hebrews 7:9), during his own life, but it also magnifies the crime of murder – as a sin that not only snuffs out one life, but also all potential life that might have proceeded from the murdered man. In this sense murder not only usurps the prerogative of God concerning *life*, but it also – in a human manner of speaking – attacks the providence of God concerning the development of the human race.

One final comment regarding the 'blood of Abel' with respect to the witness of God: we have one other notable example of a martyr calling out for

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<sup>100</sup> Von Rad; 106.

<sup>101</sup> Ainsworth; 30.

the Lord's witness of his death – verbally, though Abel's was non-verbal. This is the case of Zechariah, who was killed by King Joash. In II Chronicles 24:22 we read of Zechariah's last words, *"May the Lord see and avenge!"* While the circumstances are not the same as the murder of Abel, Jesus himself combines the two crimes as summarizing the shedding of blood throughout the generations. The Lord's comment recorded in Matthew 23 does not refer to Abel and Zechariah as the 'A to Z' of martyrs – this does not work in either Greek, Aramaic, or Hebrew – but rather to these two exemplary martyrs whose blood was seen/heard by the Lord. The vengeance required by Abel's death and called forth by Zechariah, Jesus announced, would come upon the generation that would shed His.

*Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.* (Matthew 23:34-36)

*Now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you cultivate the ground, it will no longer yield its strength to you; you will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth.* (4:11-12)

The curse upon the ground resulting from the sin of Adam was that it would no longer willingly yield up its bounty to man's labor, but only through the sweat of his brow would man extract what the earth has to offer. But because the earth was forced to drink in the blood of Cain's brother, the curse is intensified: now it will not yield itself *at all* to the efforts of Cain. "Because the earth has been compelled to drink innocent blood, it rebels against the murderer, and when he tills it, withdraws its strength, so that the soil yield no produce."<sup>102</sup> Cain was to be banished from the presence of the Lord, and would remain

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<sup>102</sup> Keil & Delitzsch; 114.

banished from the produce of the earth – a vagrant, a wanderer, a perpetual homeless man.

Subsequent generations of human civilization have learned that exile is often a far more effective and harsh punishment than execution. The Romans would send their political enemies not to the grave, but to places the punished usually found worse than that – bare rock islands in the midst of the Tyrrhenian or Adriatic Oceans, or windswept and frigid barbarian outposts a thousand miles from the Eternal City. The Apostle John felt the sting of just such a human punishment when he was exiled to the island of Patmos by the Emperor Domitian in the latter part of the first century AD. Such a separation of man from intimate society and productivity is a perpetual death, a punishment that forces the criminal or exile (John was no criminal) to suffer daily the wrath of justice. So it was to be with Cain; death was not to be immediate, but protracted.

The punishment fit the crime as well. Every time the farmer Cain attempted to extract something from the ground, he would be reminded of the blood of his brother with which he soaked the earth. “The soil which Cain had cultivated, having drunk innocent blood, would, as it were, in indignation and horror at the awful crime of fratricide, withhold its productive powers.”<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, Cain was to have no settled abode, but a *vagrant and a wanderer* he was to be upon the earth. This phrase seems to be in conflict with the sequel, where we are told that Cain “*settled in the land of Nod...and built a city.*” But the context is not one of a literally nomadic life, but rather an excommunication, as it were, *from the soil*. It may be that Cain did move about from place to place, though it is evident that he did build a city in at least one place. But the result of the intensified curse upon Cain is that he and his descendants would form a *third* class of economic Man – the artisan class. We will have occasion to consider more closely the situation of Cain subsequent to his exile, but for now it is sufficient to understand that a relationship of hostility has been set in place

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<sup>103</sup> Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown; 71.

between Cain and the soil from which he once made his livelihood. This situation is the direct result of Cain's heinous crime, and is memorialized in an act of judicial sentence by the Lord.

*Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is too great to bear! Behold, You have driven me this day from the face of the ground; and from Your face I will be hidden, and I will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me."*

**(4:13-14)**

Cain's is not the voice of repentance, but rather the first of a line of examples of men who cry out against the severity of punishment for their sin, while refusing thereby to repent. *"My punishment is too great for me!"* – what of the 'punishment' Cain had inflicted on Abel? It is interesting, however, that Cain seems to sense – unless the statement is an example of pure hypocrisy – that he will suffer untold miseries now that *"from Your face I will be hidden."* Most likely this statement indicates that Cain understood enough of the common grace of God to know that, without it, his life would be unbearable. Cain was not an atheist, nor yet a pagan, but rather an early advocate of 'natural religion.' He acknowledged God, and gave thanks to Him for the blessings of divine providence – insofar as he benefited from those blessings – but was apparently devoid of any appreciation of his own indebtedness to the holiness of God on account of his sin. There have been many such men through the course of human history, many of whom have been renown philosophers, and for each such a curse as is here levied upon Cain would have been *"too great for me!"* Cain's response constitutes 'worldly sorrow' such as exhibited later by Esau, who lamented his loss of the blessing but could not bring himself to repent, and Judas Iscariot, whose remorse over his betrayal of Jesus led not to repentance but to suicide.

Cain manifests not only a lack of repentance for his crime, but also an intense selfishness in regard to his own life. As miserable as that life will be, it is still his and he wishes to have it preserved. *"Everyone who finds me will kill me."*

This is the correct rendering of the Hebrew, although it is a somewhat hysterical statement – perhaps *anyone* who finds him might kill him, but hardly *everyone* will do so, as he will already be dead. Hysterical or not, it is clear that Cain considered his life to be in danger at every turn, which naturally leads to the question, *from whom?*

It is common to consider Cain and Abel to be the first two children born to Adam and Eve, though there is actually no way from the Hebrew to prove that (as there will also be no textual evidence that the men mentioned in the Genesis genealogies were, indeed, the firstborn sons). It does stand to reason that Cain was the firstborn, given Eve's comment at his birth; and it is also likely that Abel was near in age if not a twin. But many years may have passed since their birth – as there is no foundation for Luther's surmise that "Cain must have been about thirty years old when he slew Abel."<sup>104</sup> Given the mandate to "*multiply and fill the earth,*" we know that Adam and Eve had many more sons and daughters; it is from this brood that Cain feared vengeance. This is the role of the *go'el*, the blood-avenger, which is a very ancient tradition that long predates its mention and regulation in the Old Testament. "Blood-vengeance was not indeed as yet a custom, but it is the most primitive form of the capital punishment of the murderer."<sup>105</sup>

A person who is authorized by law, or who is duty-bound, to kill a murderer is called *go'el ha-dam* – usually translated as an avenger of blood, but more accurately to be rendered as a redeemer of blood (cf. Lev. 25:25; Ruth 3:12; I Kings 16:11). By putting the murderer to death (Num. 35:19, 21), the avenger expiates the blood shed on the polluted land (Num. 35:33). Originally private revenge was legitimate in Israel, as in other ancient civilizations, not only for homicide but also for mayhem (cf. Gen. 4:23–24) and rape (Gen. 34:25–26); and the restrictions on the avenger's rights and their legal regulation marked the beginnings of a system of criminal law.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Luther; 103.

<sup>105</sup> Delitzsch; 187.

<sup>106</sup> [http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud\\_0002\\_0003\\_0\\_03144.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0003_0_03144.html)

Later the Mosaic Code would make provision for the fair dispensation of justice, to protect a man who kills another man by accident (Numbers 35). There would be cities to which such a man could flee, and be tried in an impartial court. But there were no Cities of Refuge to which Cain could flee, no High Priest during whose tenure Cain would be secure – he was exposed to the righteous vengeance of Abel’s kinsmen, and he knew it.

*So the LORD said to him, “Therefore whoever kills Cain, vengeance will be taken on him sevenfold.” And the LORD appointed a sign for Cain, so that no one finding him would slay him. (4:15)*

Of course the point of interest among readers of this passage is the ‘sign’ that was placed on Cain to indicate God’s special protection over him. The word is too general to provide a clue; indeed, it might not have been a mark on Cain at all, but rather something – such as the later rainbow – given to assure Cain of his continued protection by God. The Jewish rabbis ranged far and wide in their own opinions as to the ‘mark’ – one believed that God gave Cain a dog to make him an example to murderers (dogs were considered dirty and vicious animals in the Ancient Near East, not domesticated pets); another stated that a horn grew out of Cain’s head, and still another that God engraved one letter of the Tetragrammaton – the ‘name’ of God – upon Cain’s forehead. The saddest commentary on this passage comes from the ‘Christian’ South of the United States, where many Protestants believed the ‘mark of Cain’ was the dark skin of a negro. This was a patent attempt to biblically justify slavery (though it fails to follow, as the sign was intended to *protect* Cain). Furthermore, the entire lineage of Cain was destroyed by the Great Flood, so the ‘sign’ or ‘mark’ no longer exists among human beings. The long and short of it is, as with so many questions that arise from Moses’ brief narrative, we simply do not know.

The purposes of God in preserving Cain will be manifest in the development of his lineage parallel to that of Seth. This was not, as some commentators reason, an act of pragmatism on the part of God. Cain probably at

that time had many brothers and sisters, and would have many more who would assist in propagating the human race. The narrative is developing the parallel 'seeds' of the woman and of the serpent. We begin with Cain and Abel - Cain is of the seed of the Serpent, and Abel is killed. In the seventh generation we reach Lamech and Enoch - Lamech proudly asserts his power over the lives of men, and Enoch is taken by God. It is a story of inveterate hostility, but also one in which God reigns supreme over the life and affairs of men. It is he who allows Abel to be sacrificed by his wicked brother, and He who banishes Cain in consequence. Later, as He heard the voice of Abel's blood, He hears the boasting of Cain's descendant Lamech...and He takes Enoch without death. These histories are parables, they are statements or milestones along the path of redemptive history that mark the two ways that all men will follow - *"See, I set before you Life and Death; choose Life."*

**Week 6:                   The Lineage of Cain: *Cities & Civilization*****Text Reading:           Genesis 4:16 - 26**

*“Of indomitable energy and endless resources,  
battling valiantly against his doom,  
he subjugated the forces of nature,  
and established a thriving community.”  
(J. Cynddylan Jones)*

Cynddylan Jones is speaking of Cain within the context of this quote, but it applies remarkably well to mankind in its entirety. It contains one of those phrases that are occasionally encountered in reading that makes one wonder if the author knew just how profound a statement he was making: *“battling valiantly against his doom.”* Five words that completely summarize the expanse of human civilization: the empires and inventions, the conquest of the world and of nature, the development of science and the arts – all an unceasing generational war against mankind’s doom. The lineage of Cain recorded so briefly in Genesis 4, presents us with a deep philosophical question – as well as the hints of an answer – concerning man’s response to the curse levied upon himself and his world due to sin: What *ought* man to do?

God curses the ground for Adam’s sake; what does man do? He continues to till the soil, he develops crop rotation and fertilizer, he irrigates so that the yield from the accursed earth is greater this harvest than last. And he suffers drought, pestilence, and crop failures, too. God curses Cain from the soil, closing off its bounty to him and casting him forth as a vagabond; what does Cain do? He builds a city within whose walls will be developed metallurgy and music. His descendants forge weapons of warfare and build empires that span thousands of miles and years. And he suffers defeat at the hands of his fellow man and, ultimately, he dies. All men die – battling valiantly against their doom.

Closer to home is the question of the believer’s relationship to the world – to cities and culture, to civilization and the advancement of Man. Moses offers



us a glimpse of the earthly occupations of several of the lineage of Cain, but will offer nothing along similar lines with regard to the descendants of Seth. Did the Sethites - the 'sons of God' - simply spend their centuries in quiet contemplation? Are the 'sons of God' called away from earthly pursuits entirely, leaving the field of development to the 'sons of men'? This has certainly been the conclusion of both Jewish and Christian scholars and practitioners across the span of years, and not least because of what we read in Genesis chapters 4 and 5 concerning the two divergent progeny of Adam and Eve. Withdrawal from the world, abandonment of worldly pursuits and occupations, and a lifetime of meditation have often been put forward as the epitome of the 'faithful' life. But it is so?

While it is true that nothing is said by the inspired narrator with regard to the occupations of Seth, or Enoch, or Noah (one assumes that shipbuilding was not his native trade), it would be unreasonable to assume thereby that these men had no occupation to speak of. To begin to sort out the answer, one must return to the original design of God in Creation, and in Man's role vis-à-vis that Creation. The ordinance of Work was given to Adam prior to his fall into sin, and therefore represents an institution that belongs to the purity of Creation and not to its corruption. It is the *frustration* and ultimately the *futility* of men's labor that results from sin, not the labor itself. The population and subjugation of the earth was commanded of Adam while in his innocence, but it was also commanded of Noah after the Great Flood - and Noah was not an innocent at that time.<sup>107</sup>

The development of the earth, of technology and the arts, is as much the birthright of the sons of God as it is of the sons of men. The difference is that the former do so in the context of stewardship (or at least they are supposed to operate from this perspective), while the latter can do no other. The perspective

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<sup>107</sup> Cp. Gen. 9:1-3 with Gen. 1:28.

of the believer with regard to all aspects of worldly life, is that so famously expressed by Abraham Kuyper, Dutch Reformed theologian, academician, and politician: “There is not one thumb’s-breadth of the entire universe, over which Christ, who alone is sovereign, does not proclaim, ‘Mine’” Kuyper believed that every Christian is duty-bound to excel in whatever field he chooses, to subdue Nature and the Earth for the glory of God. The greatest scientists, the greatest musicians, the most incisive philosophers, all should be Christians, in Kuyper’s view, and he himself strove to be an example of this perspective in all that he did in multiple fields of endeavor.



**Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920)**

So why is it that we are told of the occupations of the sons of Lamech, the descendants of Cain, while nothing is said concerning regarding the vocations of the lineage of Seth? The answer is not that the Sethites did nothing, but that the Cainites had nothing more than what they could extract from the earth. Being men, created in the image of God – which image was tarnished by the Fall but not eradicated – the descendants of both men could not help but strive against the forces of Nature, and sadly also against his fellow man, to *achieve*. But for the reprobate there is nothing more than this struggle; that is the tragedy of the fallen human condition. Cynddylan Jones writes, “But in efforts to subdue nature, to adorn temporal existence, the Bible, with strict impartiality, ascribes the precedence to the godless descendants of Cain...Expecting no blessing from heaven, they extracted all they could from the earth.”<sup>108</sup>

One further introductory note before we return to the passage in Genesis 4. The commentaries of both Jewish and Christian scholars for millennia, have postulated various (and variously wild) theories with regard to that greater portion of the human race *not* mentioned in Moses’ brief account. Certain

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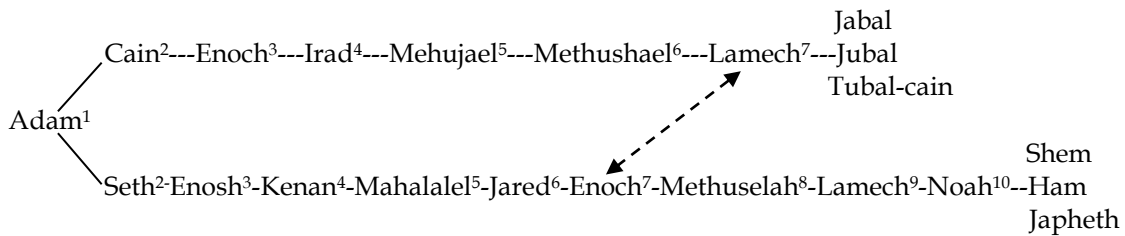
<sup>108</sup> Cynddylan Jones; 332.

assumptions are regularly made that do not stand up under scrutiny of the text. One is that the first son mentioned is the firstborn. There is no indication in the text that this is so, only that so-and-so was such-and-such years old when so-and-so was born. The assumption that the antediluvians had an adolescence that extended for decades and did not begin to procreate until well into their second centuries, is just that: an assumption.

Another assumption is that the lineages given are complete from generation to generation. This is how we would certainly like them to be, but this is not the way genealogies were written in the Ancient Near East.<sup>109</sup> Rather it was often the case – one might say always the case – that such genealogies were *stylized* and constructed with a different purpose in mind than an exact ‘family tree.’ Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus is build upon three series of fourteen, which is itself twice seven.

*So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations.* (Matthew 1:17)

Matthew at least informs us of his structure; Moses does not. But this does not mean that no structure is to be found in Moses’ genealogies. For instance, both the genealogies of Cain and of Seth follow generation to generation, and end in a threesome: Seven generations from Adam along the line of Cain bring us to the three sons of Lamech; ten generations from Adam along the line of Seth bring us to the three sons of Noah.



<sup>109</sup> One need only compare the genealogy of Jesus presented in Matthew’s gospel with that found in Luke’s to realize that Matthew’s is incomplete.

In addition to these genealogies being structured around numbers of completion – seven and ten – another example of Moses’ stylized genealogy is the contrast between the men of ‘Generation 7’ – from the lineage of Cain there is Lamech; from that of Seth, Enoch. No more vivid contrast between the developing wickedness of the sinful and earthbound race of Cain – the ‘seed of the Serpent’ – and the godly race of Seth – the ‘seed of the Woman’ – can be imagined as that between Lamech and Enoch. It may be that the genealogies are also exact, that each man is indeed the direct father/son relationship as written. But it has been well established that the Hebrew word for son also encompasses such relationships as grandson, descendant, and even successor.<sup>110</sup> The point is that we cannot be dogmatic in using Moses’ genealogies to develop the age of the earth or of mankind’s sojourn here. By putting each man’s life end-to-end we come up with an approximation of the years that passed between, say, Adam and the Flood. But we do so on the basis of a huge assumption that may well be untenable. Ultimately we should realize that what we are doing is attempting to answer the wrong questions.

*Then Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.* (4:16)

This is one of the frequent verses in the Pentateuch, and particularly in Genesis, that give rise to theories of multiple authorship of the work. Immediately after Cain is sentenced to be a wanderer and vagabond upon the face of the earth, we are told that he “settled in the land of Nod.” Soon we will be told that he proceeded to build a city. This is often seen as a contradiction in the narrative – which is to be, a vagabond or a city-dweller? The ‘documentary hypothesis’ advocate maintains that the pericope ending in verse 15 comes from a different source than that which begins with verse 16. This theory cuts the Gordian Knot of a difficult exegesis, but it does so at the expense of the literary

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<sup>110</sup> Again, Matthew gives us an explicit, and inspired, example of this very common style of writing genealogies in the ancient world.

quality of the passage as a whole, for the transition between these two 'documentary' fragments is quite abrupt; the alleged 'redactor' did a very poor job at splicing the two segments.

While it may be true that Moses worked with various strands of oral tradition concerning a period of history far removed from his own, we ought to investigate the text carefully before we assume that the best that he (or some unknown editor) could do was a very visible piece of literary Scotch tape holding two contradictory sections together. For instance, when we analyze the 'place' of Cain's dwelling - *Nod* - we find out that there is no place in the Ancient Near East with such a name, neither from biblical nor from archaeological records. Furthermore, the word is derived quite clearly from the Hebrew verb that means 'flight, wandering' with a strong connotation of misery.<sup>111</sup> "The name *Nod* denotes a land of flight and banishment, in contrast with Eden, the land of delight, where Jehovah walked with men."<sup>112</sup> Thus it may be that Moses is not attempting to indicate any specific 'land' or region that might be known to his reader, but is making a play on words, an ironical contrast between Cain's *dwelling* and his status as a vagabond, a restless wanderer. "A land of Nod is geographically unknown to us; more important is the fact that the Hebrew recognized in the name his word *nad*, 'fugitive.' It is therefore the land of restlessness."<sup>113</sup>

*Cain had relations with his wife and she conceived, and gave birth to Enoch; and he built a city, and called the name of the city Enoch, after the name of his son. (4:17)*

Given this interpretation of verse 16 - that Cain was no less a vagabond for having 'settled' in the 'land of Nod' - we are still faced with the fact that he then proceeded to build a city. The verb is progressive: *he was building a city*, indicating an ongoing task. This, too, seems to contradict the divine curse that he

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<sup>111</sup> Delitzsch; *Genesis*; 189.

<sup>112</sup> Keil & Delitzsch; 115-116.-

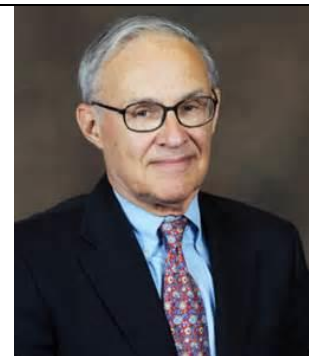
<sup>113</sup> Von Rad; 107.

would be a fugitive and wanderer on the earth. To answer this, we first reference the introductory comments to this lesson, to the effect that mankind - sometimes properly, many times improperly - to negate the impact of the curse of Adam, and of all subsidiary curses such as the one pronounced on Cain. In addition, however, we must note what the text means when it says that Cain was to be a *“vagrant and wanderer on the earth.”* Cain himself gives us the meaning in his response to God, recorded in verse 14,

*Behold, You have driven me this day from the face of the ground; and from Your face I will be hidden, and I will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.*

The curse did not preclude Cain from building a city, for even in a settled dwelling place - even one called ‘wanderings’ - a man remains a vagabond when he is exiled both from the ‘face of the ground’ and from the face of Jehovah. Furthermore, Cain’s own interpretation of the divine curse provides us with the motivation for his building a city: *“and whoever finds me will kill me.”* Cain remained frightened of the avenger of blood, in spite of God’s assurance and seal set upon him. This should not surprise us, for Cain was an unbeliever.

The word translated ‘city’ in verse 17 does not require the concept of a huge metropolis, as we might envision a city today, but rather a fortified dwelling, particularly one with some sort of palisade or wall. The purpose of such a place is evidently self-protection.<sup>114</sup> Leon Kass writes, “The city is almost certainly founded on the fear of death and with a view to safety.”<sup>115</sup>



**Leon Kass (1939 -)**

Yet Cain’s building of a city denotes more than just his perceived need for a defensive structure to help secure his own life (though that may be all it meant to him). Once again we must remember the literary purpose of Moses in

<sup>114</sup> Delitzsch; 190.

<sup>115</sup> Kass, Leon *The Beginning of Wisdom* (New York: Free Press; 2003); 145.

contrasting the two lineages of mankind, and see here the foreshadowing of that earthly city of which Augustine was to write in his magnum opus, *De Civitate Dei*, "The City of God." The 'city' will generally carry negative connotations in the Bible, as "rooted in fear, greed, pride, violence, and the desire for domination."<sup>116</sup> Ainsworth's comment on this passage is borne out by the sequel concerning Cain's descendants.

Cain's building of a city, seemeth to be for his better security from his fears, and to denote his worldly affections, otherwise than Abraham had, who 'looked for a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.'<sup>117</sup>

We are introduced obliquely to Cain's wife in this verse as well, and that has stimulated innumerable discussions and theories concerning where Cain found a woman to marry. The simplest, and much preferred, conclusion is that Cain married a sister, one of the daughters of Adam and Eve. The reason this simple understanding has so often been rejected is the later prohibition upon incest (*cp.* Lev. 18:6-18). The answer to this is fairly obvious: the generation of the human race from one man (one couple) necessitates the intermarriage of siblings and near relations, at least for several generations until the race grows large enough to provide further remove of consanguinity (i.e., cousin, second cousin, and beyond). "No previous mention is made of Cain's marriage; but that is not wonderful in so succinct and fragmentary a history; and whether she was a daughter of Adam or of one of his numerous sons, no objection can be made against the propriety of such a connection, as marriages with near relatives were matters of necessity in the infancy of the human race."<sup>118</sup>

Furthermore, with our modern understanding of genetics coupled with a biblical view of the origin and propagation of sin, we can understand that marriage between close relations in the early years of man's history would not

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<sup>116</sup> Kass; 147.

<sup>117</sup> Ainsworth; 31.

<sup>118</sup> Jamieson, Fausset, Brown; 73.

experience the compounding effects of recessive genes that would become both common and dangerous as time and generations go by. Arthur Custance, in his essay titled "*Cain Marries a Sister*," writes,

On the other hand, taking the biblical story as it stands, Adam's sons and daughters, of whom Cain was one and his wife another, need not have been carriers of any more than a mere token of damaged genetic stock. Such a marriage need not have endangered the offspring.<sup>119</sup>

*Now to Enoch was born Irad, and Irad became the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael became the father of Methushael, and Methushael became the father of Lamech.*

(4:18)

Moses' intent is clearly to move from Cain to Lamech, and the names given of the intermediate generational markers are, like the lives of the men denominated, of no concern to the inspired writer. "This, however, is without controversy, that many persons, as well males as females, are omitted in this narrative; it being the design of Moses only to follow the line of [Cain's] progeny, until he should come to Lamech."<sup>120</sup> Nothing is said about their years of birth or the duration of their lives; nor is there any discussion as to the quality of the man or what he may have done for a living. "This oblivion to which the Cainite patriarchs are consigned shows the little estimation in which the Spirit of Inspiration holds mere men of the world; for the growth of this branch of the human family is wholly identified with the progressive development of material forces."<sup>121</sup> This brevity reminds us of the innumerable masses of Adam's descendants who are called out by no more than "*and so-and-so had many more sons and daughters.*" The narrative flows quickly over four generations of the descendants of Cain to bring us abruptly to the next mile marker, Lamech. "Our attention is focused on Lamech, the seventh - the completed or fulfilled -

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<sup>119</sup> Custance, Arthur *Time and Eternity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan; 1977); 233.

<sup>120</sup> Calvin; 215-216.

<sup>121</sup> Jamieson, Fausset, Brown; 73.



generation of the line (through Cain) begun by Adam. It is in this generation that civilization flowers."<sup>122</sup>

*Lamech took to himself two wives: the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other, Zillah.* (4:19)

It is worth pausing in one's reading of Genesis 4, to contemplate the shift in emphasis encountered in verse 19. We encounter the first evidence of polygamy and, remarkably, the naming of the two wives of Lamech. The name Adah apparently derives from the Hebrew for *adornment*; that of Zillah from *shadow*. Too much has been read into the alleged meanings of the names, but it is significant that they are even mentioned. What one must consider in this vein is the audience for whom Moses was originally writing - Hebrews in the wilderness some two thousand plus years removed from the events described. What would names mean to these people? Possibly that Adah was beautiful, and that Zillah was the secondary wife. Or perhaps these names were already known to the Israelites from the oral tradition that had passed this history from generation to generation. If that is the case, then we may conclude that the family of Lamech was famous, if perhaps notorious, for generations.

The emphasis in this central part of the narrative is not merely on Lamech, but on his immediate family - including his wives and, even more remarkably, a daughter, Naamah. There is something about this family, something even more than what is recorded here, that must have struck a note in both Moses' mind and that of his collective readership. Moses' description is once again brief, though it is far more substantive than that of any other individual family. We are given the names of Lamech's wives and those of his three sons. We are told what his sons did for a living, providing some indication of the development of civilization along the Cainite line. And, as just mentioned, we are told the name of his daughter - though nothing more is said of her at all. We have grown

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<sup>122</sup> Kass; 145.

accustomed to asking Moses, *Why so little detail?* Now we are tempted to ask, *Why so much?*

***Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. As for Zillah, she also gave birth to Tubal-cain, the forger of all implements of bronze and iron; and the sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah. (4:20-22)***

The names of Lamech's three sons all derive from a similar root – *Jabal*, *Jubal*, and *Tubal*, and it may be that the additive *Cain* given with the third son pertains to each, as in *Jabal-cain*, *Jubal-cain*, and *Tubal-cain*.<sup>123</sup> The accomplishments of each son are 'celebrated,' as progenitors of certain trades and crafts – nomadic shepherds, musical instruments, and metallurgy. The description of the sons of Lamech is evidently intended to show the beginnings of various worldly pursuits, and the skill with which the descendants of Cain accomplished these pursuits. The list of vocations is by no means exhaustive, but it is varied enough to show that earliest Man was no primitive troglodyte. Rather he was a highly sophisticated and effective builder of cities, culture, and civilization. "Notwithstanding the brevity of the notices, enough is said to show that the antediluvians were a mighty people, muscularly strong, intellectually powerful, and artistically trained."<sup>124</sup>

Before developing a theory as to the significance of the family of Lamech, it is interesting to note the presence of a daughter, Naamah, among the others. It was the tradition of Jewish scholars that Naamah – whose name means 'beautiful' – became the wife of Ham. This view is then used to explain how the fame of Lamech's family passed down through the generations of the antediluvians and through to the family of Noah that survived the Flood. Speaking of the 'Sword Song' of Lamech in verses 23-24, Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown comment,

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<sup>123</sup> That is, at least, the view of several Hebrew scholars, but it probably does not have any bearing on the exegesis of the text.

<sup>124</sup> Cynddylan Jones; 337.

...its transmission to the times of Moses may be accounted for, if we accept the tradition that Naamah, the daughter of Lamech, became the wife of Ham, through whom, or his son Canaan, the respective ancestors of the Egyptians and Canaanites, it was preserved, till it was afterward embodied in the popular minstrelsy of both countries.<sup>125</sup>

Frankly, it is hard to imagine that Naamah became the wife of Ham. One obvious objection would be the potentially vast difference in age. Naamah belonged to the eighth generation from Adam; Ham to the eleventh. Even if one accepts that the genealogies are stylized, it is still part of the narrative as written that these two persons were born generations apart, and are never associated within the story itself. Indeed, this ancient tradition is only mentioned inasmuch as it might serve to explain the erroneous 'mark of Cain' as being the dark skin of the Negro - a physical trait that has often, and with equal error, been assigned to the curse on Ham. In truth, this theory ought to be consigned to the trash can, where also belong so many other ancient rabbinic traditions.

There may be a more reasonable and plausible explanation for the 'fame' of Lamech and his family: they represent the mortal forerunners to the ancient gods of pagan mythology. The plausibility of this theory, which we will develop momentarily, is borne out by Moses' clear development of an apologetic upon monotheism, and his polemic against the paganism and idolatry of Egypt, throughout the Pentateuch. As it applies to Lamech's family, however, some of the arguments that have been advanced are at least interesting, if not compelling.

The strongest of these is in reference to the third son mentioned, Tubal-cain. As the father of metallurgy it is not a tremendous stretch to recognize the derivative of his name in the Roman god Vulcan, the pagan lord of fire, metalworking, and the forge. Tubal-cain's siblings also have names reminiscent of ancient pagan deities. Delitzsch traces the names of the three sons, as well as the daughter, in Assyrian and Sanskrit, and notes similarities with several

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<sup>125</sup> Jamieson, Fausset, Brown; 75.

deities. "It may be only by mere chance that the name of Apollo is symphonious with the first two names (i.e., their Assyrian equivalents), and that of Vulcan with the third, while at the same time the name of Lamech's daughter is of like signification with Venus, whose name in Sanscrit is derived from *vanas*, delight, gracefulness."<sup>126</sup> Several scholars develop this speculation - for it is but speculation - showing linkages between Apollo and music, etc. But the strongest support for such conjecture derives from several undeniable points. First, Moses was writing to an audience seeped in pagan idolatry through generations of exposure to the Egyptian pantheon, and second, that the names of Lamech's children are given in such a manner as assumes recognition. This latter point is especially valid when one considers the demise of the entire lineage of Cain in the Deluge.

Third, though perhaps more philosophically than hermeneutically, the linkage between antediluvians and the pagan gods of the post-Flood era provides a reasonable foundation for what would otherwise be an inexplicable phenomenon. Whence the gods of the pagans? From their memory, through oral tradition across generations, of the 'mighty men' (and beautiful women) of the dawn of human history. This race was obliterated from the earth, but their characters and accomplishments survived in narrative form, and were doubtlessly embellished into legend and then into myth. "The heathen gods are not merely deified natural objects, but some of them also deified human beings; and there is nothing which in itself need astonish us to find roots of their histories in the worldly-minded house of Cain."<sup>127</sup>

Lamech's sons and daughter were noteworthy, of that there can be no doubt even if we debate the import of their preservation in Moses' history. But the narrative is fundamentally about the patriarch of this illustrious clan: Lamech

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<sup>126</sup> Delitzsch; 197.

<sup>127</sup> *Idem*.

himself. Thus the narrative shifts back to him, and provides us with perhaps the oldest 'Sword Song' in recorded history, *The Sword Song of Lamech*.

*Lamech said to his wives,  
 "Adah and Zillah, listen to my voice,  
 You wives of Lamech, give heed to my speech,  
 For I have killed a man for wounding me;  
 And a boy for striking me;  
 If Cain is avenged sevenfold,  
 Then Lamech seventy-sevenfold."* (4:23-24)

The form of this passage is poetic, with the typical strophes and parallelism common to both Hebrew and Ancient Near Eastern poetry and wisdom literature. The topic marks it out as a 'sword song,' a form of epic and lyrical poetry common in all generations of human history, but particularly among the most ancient. The Hebrew scholars who have dissected this passage tell us that it could be past tense, representing an act that Lamech had already done, or future potential, with Lamech boasting of sufficient strength and valor to avenge himself against any injury. In any event, the poem clearly indicates a bold and brash man who cares little or nothing for the protection promised to Cain; he will take matters into his own hands and outdo God in vengeance. "Lamech is not satisfied with the protection that God promised to his ancestor, Cain; he takes upon himself the execution of vengeance and takes his revenge recklessly."<sup>128</sup> It seems reasonable to conclude that Jesus had this poem in mind when He answered the question as to how often a man is obliged to forgive his brother,

*Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven."* (Matthew 18:21-22)

Lamech's song (or at least a portion of it; it was probably longer in its original form) is included at this point both in summary and in anticipation.

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<sup>128</sup> Von Rad; 111.

Lamech's attitude, and his reference to Cain, summarizes the narrative that flows from Cain to Lamech and shows the deepening of sin's hold upon the Cainites. As such, the sword song also provides the introduction for the consequent narrative that will end in the Flood, the destruction of nearly the entire human race on account of its inveterate wickedness. Moses' narrative account "paints a vivid picture of the bloody indecency connected with the way of Cain and the pursuit of self-sufficiency and heroism."<sup>129</sup> But we must take note of the 'positive' things that are included in this narrative - especially the industriousness displayed by the Cainites through animal husbandry, metallurgy, and the arts. The wickedness of man manifests itself through *civilization*, or what passes for it, and this has been the pattern throughout the ages from Cain to the present. Once again we see that sin did not render mankind bestial, that men still possessed and possess great intellectual and creative powers. But these powers serve man alone, and are permeated and corrupted by a sinful heart that refuses to acknowledge and worship God (*cp.* Romans 1:21ff). Of the seemingly productive contributions of Cain's descendants to the human race, Keil writes, "They have their roots rather in the mental powers with which man was endowed for the sovereignty and subjugation of the earth, but which, like all the other powers and tendencies of his nature, were pervaded by sin, and desecrated in its service."<sup>130</sup> This principle is so evident in the narrative of Cain's lineage, culminating in the Sword Song of Lamech, that many commentators further theorize that Lamech's martial prowess was furnished by his son's forged weaponry. Man's disposition to turn technological advancement into instruments of violence has a very ancient pedigree.

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<sup>129</sup> Kass; 148.

<sup>130</sup> Keil & Delitzsch; 119.

*Adam knew his wife again; and she gave birth to a son, and named him Seth, for, she said, "God has appointed me another offspring in place of Abel, for Cain killed him." To Seth, to him also a son was born; and he called his name Enosh. Then men began to call upon the name of the LORD.* (4:25-26)

Enough of the Cainites, for the focus of Scripture is really not judgment but redemption. The God who delights in lovingkindness and mercy may remember and visit the iniquity of the wicked to the third and fourth generation, but His grace extends to the thousandth generation of those who fear Him. Thus it does not surprise us that so little is said concerning the lineage of Cain, and that abruptly we pass from that strain of reprobate, the seed of the Serpent, back to the lineage of the redeemed, the seed of the Woman. Again, there is no reason to conclude that Adam and Eve had no other sons but Cain and Abel, nor that Seth was the son born immediately after these events – though the latter is a more reasonable deduction than the former. Eve is more subdued in naming this son – Seth, meaning *appointed* – than she was when Cain was born. Perhaps the events of Cain's life, and Abel's death, and the manifest rejection of Cain by God (and of God by Cain), had sobered her to the understanding that the redemption of Man was not going to be a short order thing. Be that as it may, Moses introduces Seth here as the counterpoise to Cain, and introduces a formula that will characterize the notables of Seth's lineage up to the Flood and beyond: "*men began to call upon the name of the Lord.*"

What is said of Seth and his descendants will be repeated beginning in Chapter 5, so the focus of our attention here will be on that enigmatic phrase. It is not difficult on account of a questionable translation; the Hebrew is not problematic here: *men began to call upon the name of the Lord*. The difficulties come elsewhere, in the exegesis of the meaning of the verse. For one thing, the 'name' of the Lord here is, remarkably, *YHWH*, which we are told elsewhere in the Pentateuch was a divine name unknown to the ancients.

*God spoke further to Moses and said to him, "I am the LORD; and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name, LORD, I did not make Myself known to them.* (Exodus 6:2-3)

The smaller capital letters of the New American Standard version, *LORD*, serve as an translation device to indicate that the name here is *YHWH*, as it is in Genesis 4:26. So how can it be that the men of Enosh's generation called upon the name of the LORD when that divine name was not even revealed to the patriarch Abraham, many centuries later? This is a 'bible difficulty,' but rather than locate the difficulty in Genesis 4:26, it may be in our understanding of Exodus 6:2-3. For earlier in Exodus God reveals Himself to Moses in more unequivocal terms. In response to Moses' question as to who he should say had sent him to the children of Israel in Egypt, God says,

*God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God, furthermore, said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations.* (Exodus 3:14-15)

Here Moses links the name of the LORD with the "*God of your fathers...*" and describes this most holy name as His "*memorial name to all generations.*" Thus the difficulty in interpretation lies with Exodus 6, not Genesis 4. This is, of course, a convenient conclusion as the exegesis of Exodus 6 is beyond the scope of this study of Genesis! In any event, we are faced in Genesis 4:26 with a shift in the religious sensibilities of the human race, as indicated by the phrase "*call upon the name of the Lord.*"

A few commentators, perhaps because of a perceived conflict with Exodus 6, infer that the 'calling' in Genesis 4:26 is profane, and conclude that this was the chronological beginning of idolatry. Ainsworth, following Jewish rabbinic midrash, espouses this view, but hedges his bets a little later with the possibility that Moses intended a positive meaning to the phrase. "If we understand Moses



here otherwise...then it may be meant of more public worship now erected than before: or, of public preaching in the name of the Lord."<sup>131</sup>

It does not seem reasonable to interpret this phrase as idolatry, on two accounts at least. First, it is mentioned early in the lineage of Seth, which is a very unusual place to introduce idolatry unless Moses desires to set the backdrop for the more illustrious redemptive line of Seth. If so, however, it would still be more reasonable to expect the phrase to be located nearer the Sword Song, and prior to the announcement of Seth's birth, than in its present location. A second objection is simply that the phrase "*to call on*" always indicates worship. One commentary notes in greater detail,

'The name,' as used in Scripture, expressed the attributes of the person to whom it is applied, - in fact, his being, character, works. 'To call upon the name of the Lord,' denotes to *believe in, to trust, honour, and obey Him*.<sup>132</sup>

It is most reasonable, therefore, to conclude that in the days of Enosh men - and we also have to assume these men were predominantly if not entirely of the lineage of Seth - began to worship the Lord in a more settled manner. This possibly would include a stated time of worship (perhaps the beginning of the Sabbath service?), as well as a more recognized clergy. This interpretation is at least hinted at by the facts that in the New Testament, Enoch is called a prophet (Jude 14) and Noah a 'preacher of righteousness' (II Peter 2:5). "Whereas previously the service was confined to the offering of sacrifices and the confession of sin, in the days of Enos prayer, instruction, and exhortation were added - the germs of prophecy, the first beginnings of preaching."<sup>133</sup>

This brings the narrative to its purpose, a purpose that once again is paradigmatic of the rest of biblical revelation: the contrast of the two lines of mankind set forth in Genesis 3:15. The application of this prophetic conflict is

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<sup>131</sup> Ainsworth; 34.

<sup>132</sup> Jamieson, Fausset, Brown; 76.

<sup>133</sup> Cynddylan Jones; 344.

now brought into the realm of an expanding race, and more significantly, the development of human civilization and culture. Herein lies the fundamental truth concerning Man: that there are those *"whose god is their belly"* and those whose God is the LORD. Kass summarizes the narrative by stating, "mankind is now meaningfully divided into those who do and those who do not seek communication with the Lord."<sup>134</sup> Keil adds,

While the family of Cainites, by the erection of a city, and the invention and development of worldly arts and business, were laying the foundation for the kingdom of this world; the family of the Sethites began, by united invocation of the name of the God of grace, to found and to erect the kingdom of God.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Kass; 150.

<sup>135</sup> Keil & Delitzsch; 120.

**Week 7: The Book of the Generations of Adam****Text Reading: Genesis 5:1 - 31**

*“Some intrusive factor appears to be resident  
in the somatic or body cells which acts upon the whole organism  
like a fatal disease.”  
(Arthur Custance)*

Progeria is a rare genetic disease whereby the human body ages rapidly, whirling through the various stages of biological life far faster than the ‘normal’ passage of calendar years. Those who suffer from this disease are unlikely to live beyond their late teens or early twenties, and when they succumb to the illness their biological systems have the characteristics of someone many decades older. In short, they die of ‘old age’ long before old age arrives. To the afflicted those around him seem to be living in slow motion – taking what is considered to be the ‘normal’ path of life while he or she flies through at three times the pace. Is it possible, in light of the ‘book of the generations of Adam’ in Genesis 5, that the rest of the human race is also afflicted with a form of progeria? Arthur Custance posits this theory in reflection on the seemingly unbelievable life spans of the antediluvians listed in this chapter.

Progeria is a peculiarly sad disease for those who are afflicted with it, for they see their lives racing by while their contemporaries slowly mature with what must appear to them ‘all the time in the world’ to enjoy life. It seems to me that we would all feel this if we found ourselves living alongside of Methusaleh...It is not known what causes the disease but it is perhaps worth remembering that we might not recognize it as a disease at all if it equally afflicted *all* of us. The fact is that, for all we know, we who live only three score years and ten may be suffering from a form of progeria relative to the biblical patriarchs whose lives spanned ten times as many years.<sup>136</sup>

How is a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Christian to respond to the unbelief leveled at the Genesis account of men living nigh unto a thousand years? How indeed, when

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<sup>136</sup> Custance, Arthur *The Seed of Woman* (Brockville, Ontario: Doorway Publications; 1980); 26.

many of the disbelief comes from within the professing Church? Enlightenment rationalism, Modernism, and most certainly Post-modernism each have in their turn labeled the narrative of the lineage of Adam through Seth as 'myth' and 'unscientific,' convinced as all mankind seems to be that *we* live in the Golden Age of humanity and that no prior members of our race could have experienced such protracted lives. Within the scholarly community of professing Christendom, many attempts have been made to salvage the integrity of the narrative while bringing the life spans of the characters into a more 'believable' realm. The higher critics of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century assigned greatly reduced periods of time to the Hebrew word 'year' in the Genesis narrative, but due to the differing and reducing age when the patriarch begat a son, the 'corrected' lengths of the year had to be modified within the narrative itself or the father would be bringing a son into the world at an equally ridiculous *young* age. Thus we are told that the 'year' constituted merely a month in some places, three months in other places, eight in other ages, until finally arriving at a true twelvemonth in the days of either Joseph or Moses.<sup>137</sup> The methodology is clearly arbitrary, motivated by an *a priori* conclusion that men never have and never could live to the advanced ages assigned to the ten patriarch of the Sethite lineage.

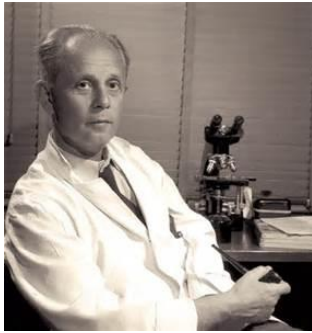
But is it indeed incredible that men should live to be over nine hundred years old?<sup>138</sup> Numerous pathological studies conducted over the past seventy years have shown conclusively that single cell organisms *need never die*, with some colonies of cells living and reproducing ten and hundreds of thousands of generations until they are finally terminated on purpose. The human body is obviously not a single cell organism; perhaps its 'inherent' mortality lies in its complexity? Further studies have proven, however, that the concept of 'natural death' in man is as scientifically inaccurate as the phrase 'sunrise' – constantly

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<sup>137</sup> Mitchell, H. G. *The World Before Abraham* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company; 1901); 178.

<sup>138</sup> To put the whole discussion into perspective: if Methusaleh were alive and in his final year in 2016, then the year of his birth would have been AD 1060, six years before the Norman invasion of Britain. Such a man would have had the opportunity (assuming a cloudless night) of witnessing Halley's Comet twelve times.

used, never correct. “Thus when a man dies, he really dies because something *kills* him. He is, in fact, put to death. It may be by some disease, or it may be by a



**Dr. Hans Selye (1907-82)**

defect, or injury, or accident. The cause of death is foreign to the phenomenon of life. Death is strictly not ‘natural’ to man so far as the medical evidence goes.”<sup>139</sup> Custance references one of the leading authorities on the pathological impact of stress on humans, Dr. Hans Selye, as “asserting that in all his autopsies he has never yet seen a man who died simply of old age, nor does he think anyone ever has.”<sup>140</sup>

There is ample evidence from the medical scientific community that there is no *necessity* of human death in seventy, eighty, or ninety years. And there are perpetual examples of people living above a hundred years, with the number of centenarians increasing every year for the past generation. This, however, does not ‘prove’ that the biblical account of the antediluvians living over nine centuries must be taken as literal fact rather than mythological symbol. It remains the case that the believer in scriptural inerrancy cannot *prove* the narrative true, only that it is *reasonable* – or at least not unreasonable. We approach this task along three paths: the first, already taken, is to show that physical death is not a concomitant part of human life – or at least not of cellular life of which the human body is composed. The second track is to note the frequency of remarkably advanced longevity among the annals of ancient literature and record. Finally, we may revisit the composition of man as first created, and reason from thence the feasibility of very long life at least among those who followed closest upon Adam’s creation.

The second line of pursuit in defense of the reasonableness of the biblical record in Genesis 5 is to note the common narrative among ancient cultures of a

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<sup>139</sup> Custance; *op cit.*; 6.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*; 5.

Golden Age having existed *prior to* the era contemporary to the writings. In other words, most ancient cultures have literature that refers to earlier members of the same culture having lived remarkably long lives. For instance, the Babylonian priest and historian Berosus (c. 330-260 BC) writes of ten kings of the Chaldeans who lived before the Deluge.<sup>141</sup> The unit of measurement for the reigns of these ten kings (not their entire lives but only their *reigns*) is the 'sar,' which archaeologists have estimated at 3,600 years. The first king, Alorus, reigned for ten sars; the second, Alparus, for three sars; and on down the list of ten. "Thus, when summed up, the kings are ten; and the sars are one hundred and twenty [or four hundred and thirty-two thousand years, reaching to the flood]."<sup>142</sup> This account contains longevity far above the biblical account, making the biblical antediluvians appear as men afflicted with progeria in comparison with these ten Chaldean kings. But the point of this discussion is not to prove the historical accuracy of either the Genesis account or the annals of Berosus, but rather to illustrate the common theme among the ancients not only of a Great Flood, but of great men who lived very long lives in the era before the Flood. As with the Flood narrative itself – equally common among the ancients – it is as reasonable to conclude that the various accounts of long-lived heroes derive from a common story, one that passed down orally from generation to generation, through the Flood and beyond. C. F. Keil writes in his commentary on the passage,

The objection, that such longevity as that recorded in our chapter is inconceivable according to the existing condition of human nature, loses all its force if we consider that all the memorials of the old world contain evidence of gigantic power; that the climate, the weather, and other natural conditions, were different from those after the flood; that life was much more simple and uniform;

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<sup>141</sup> Note the number ten, the same as the genealogy of Adam through Seth as recorded in Genesis 5; note also that the Chaldean cosmology included a narrative of the Flood.

<sup>142</sup> Davis, John D. *Genesis and Semitic Tradition*; 97.

and that the after-effects of the condition of man in paradise would not be immediately exhausted.<sup>143</sup>

This last comment regarding the 'after-effects' of man's fall into sin, leads us to the third line of thought in defending the reasonableness of the biblical narrative of Genesis chapter 5. Thinking theologically about the 'biology' of early man, we must conclude that man in Adam was created with 'conditional immortality.' Adam was *capable* of dying, but death was not inherent in him – immortality was potential on condition of obedience. The biblical record is consistent in both testaments that death is an enemy, an invader introduced into human nature not via creation, but rather via sin. Thus Adam in his pristine state was, quite reasonably, a man of inconceivable vitality: the vitality of immortality, and not merely eight or nine centuries of life.

This physical/biological reservoir of life power was tapped, and began to drain, the moment Adam rebelled against God his Maker. But there is no reason to conclude that the entire reservoir emptied in 'three score and ten' years. Rather is it more reasonable to understand that sin, like many diseases, encompassed the vital energy of Adam and the antediluvian patriarchs *progressively* rather than *immediately*. That Adam did not physically die at the moment he sinned makes it far more reasonable – when one considers his pristine created nature – that he did not subsequently die for over nine hundred years, than that he should die at seventy or eighty years of age. "The state of integrity was succeeded by a stage of transition, during which death, the result of sin, but slowly overcame the resistance offered by the strong physical organization of primitive mankind."<sup>144</sup> The reversal of this impact of sin upon physical longevity forms an integral part of the prophetic vision of the New Heaven and New Earth, as for instance in the prophecy of Isaiah, where a man's death at one hundred years of age will be considered the tragic death of a youth.

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<sup>143</sup> Keil & Delitzsch; 123.

<sup>144</sup> Delitzsch *Genesis*; 212.

*No longer will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days,  
 Or an old man who does not live out his days;  
**For the youth will die at the age of one hundred**  
 And the one who does not reach the age of one hundred  
 Will be thought accursed.  
 They will build houses and inhabit them;  
 They will also plant vineyards and eat their fruit.  
 They will not build and another inhabit,  
 They will not plant and another eat;  
**For as the lifetime of a tree, so will be the days of My people,**  
 And My chosen ones will wear out the work of their hands.*

(Isaiah 65:20-22)

Arthur Custance summarizes our discussion,

Certainly there is nothing unreasonable about these very ancient records of unusual longevity in the early chapters of Genesis. They have not been taken seriously enough, either by those in the Life Sciences (which is a pity) nor even by Christians (which is a tragedy). From these records we may learn a great deal about the *potential* life span of man, as well as about the origin of death as it relates specifically to man by contrast with other species.<sup>145</sup>

*This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day when God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and He blessed them and named them Man in the day when they were created.* (5:1-2)

The opening verses of Chapter 5 are a reminder of what we have already read in Chapters 1 & 2. Higher criticism concludes that this chapter is 'obviously' the work of a different author than of either of the earlier chapters. The strongest argument against this conclusion, however, is the relatively abrupt way that Chapter 5 fits into the overall structure of the book, with a recapitulation of the Creation Account that is seemingly unnecessary in light of the double narrative of Chapter 1 and Chapter 2. The text itself provides an indication of what we are perhaps dealing with: "This is *the book of the generations of Adam...*" The word translated 'book' is most commonly a 'register' or a complete record of some transaction or event. In this case it is an account of the

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<sup>145</sup> Custance, *op cit.*; 28.



'generations' (Hebrew *toledoth*) of Adam, though it soon becomes apparent that not all of Adam's descendents – in fact not even most of Adam's descendents – are enumerated. *Toledoth* becomes a standard literary device used by Moses to demarcate separate sections of his narrative, especially in the Book of Genesis. This chapter, therefore, is quite possibly a generational account that was passed down orally through the line of Shem, after the Flood, recording that branch of Adam's offspring through which the promise of the Seed of Woman would come. It is, as it were, the 'royal' line, the lineage of the Promised One, as opposed to a full-blown family tree.

If this is the case, then it becomes at least somewhat clearer why the first two verses repeat and summarize the first two chapters of the book. Nothing is said, of course, in contradiction of the earlier narrative: Man was created in the image of God, male and female was Man created, etc. The function of these verses, therefore, is to refresh the reader's mind as to the pristine origin of mankind, in order to proceed with that single thread of human history in which faith was preserved, before narrating the wholesale degeneration of the rest of the race (beginning in Chapter 6). It is as if Moses is reminding the reader of just how wonderful a beginning Man had, in order to throw into starker contrast just what a horrible mess Man subsequently made of things.

*When Adam had lived one hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son in his own likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth.* (5:3)

It must be stated at the beginning of this common formula of presenting the genealogy of Adam, that the age of the father at the birth of the son listed does not necessarily mean the age at the birth of the firstborn son. We know, obviously, that Seth was not Adam's firstborn son. But we also need not assume that Seth was the *next* son born after the death of Abel – there is no inherent foundation for this conclusion in the text. Many evangelical commentators make the tacit assumption that each son mentioned (except, of course, Seth) is the

firstborn. But this interpretation flows not from the text, but from the Western social doctrine of *primogeniture* – that the firstborn would inherit. Thus it is assumed that the first mention of a son is the firstborn son, even though God displays a striking disinterest in the doctrine of primogeniture throughout the biblical redemptive narrative.

Indeed, even a cursory reading of the Pentateuch as well as the biblical histories of the Old Testament, would lead rather to the conclusion that God strictly *avoids* any notion of primogeniture as part of His redemptive election: Jacob was the second born of twins, Judah was fourth born son of an unloved wife. Moses was the younger sibling of Aaron and Miriam; and David, most famously, was the youngest of Jesse's eight sons, yet it was he who was anointed by Samuel to be king over Israel. It is a wonder why anyone would simply assume that the pattern of Genesis 5 follows the guidelines of primogeniture. What is evident, and only evident, is that the son listed in Genesis 5 is that one through whom the promised Seed of Woman was to come.

Even the frequent statement in this chapter, "*and he had other sons and daughters*" is not conclusive in favor of the son listed being the firstborn. This is because Hebrew literature is not consecutive as is most Western literature, but most often concurrent. In other words, the conjunction 'and' never definitively indicates a progression of *time*, but rather one of *thought*. These men had many sons and daughters, but this fact surrounds the birth of the son listed rather than follows that birth. Many of the sons and daughters were perhaps older, many younger – we simply do not know. But it is important to note the *presuppositional* role played by primogeniture, a doctrine more frequently set aside by God than followed. Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown provide a helpful comment in light of this discussion, referring to the cursory mention made by Moses of the 'many other sons and daughters':

But the principle reason why they are entirely omitted is, that the sacred historian did not contemplate a general history or a biographical memoir of the primitive family, but only a brief notice of one particular branch of it from which the Messiah was to derive his lineage. Omitting, in all probability, many sons in the successive families even of the Sethite line, he has given a genealogical list, which comprises in each only the name of that person who formed the connecting link in the chain of direct descent. The birth of Seth is recorded before the mention of the other sons and daughters of Adam, but there is every reason to believe that the birth of many of them were prior to his, and that Seth, who was born in his father's hundred and thirtieth year, was amongst the youngest of the family.<sup>146</sup>

What is of greater significance in regard to Seth's birth is the manner in which Moses portrays his relationship to his father Adam, as the first man "*became the father of a son in his own likeness.*" This is clearly an allusion to what has just been said in regard to the creation of Adam and Eve in the likeness of God, and draws a stark contrast between Adam as created and Seth as born of Adam. Indeed, the entire doctrine of Original Sin is latent in this one short phrase, as "Like begets like; and so Seth inherited, as all men do, the corrupt nature of fallen Adam."<sup>147</sup> John Calvin writes, "If he [Adam] had remained upright, he would have transmitted to all his children what he had received; but now we read that Seth, as well as the rest, was defiled; because Adam, who had fallen from his original state, could beget none but such as were like himself."<sup>148</sup>

Commentators of the modern liberal variety have attempted to make Seth the 'real' firstborn son of Adam by noting that this phrase, "*in his own likeness,*" is not written of either Cain or Abel. Leon Kass writes, "Seth, it seems, and not Cain, was the son begot in Man's likeness and image, and hence, derivatively, in the likeness (once removed) of God."<sup>149</sup> This view fits in with the Documentary Hypothesis framework followed by these interpreters, in which the various segments of the Pentateuch originated from the pens of many different authors

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<sup>146</sup> Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown; 79.

<sup>147</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>148</sup> Calvin; 228-229.

<sup>149</sup> Kass; 153.

and editors. Hence they conclude that Genesis 5 is in reality wholly disconnected from what has gone before: Seth is the son that matters; Cain and Abel were the 'sons' of a different myth or tradition and the story has now passed them by.

This line of exegesis is conspicuous for its lack of understanding of the doctrines of grace. The lineage of Adam through Seth would prove to be the lineage of grace, with such notable men of faith as Enoch and Noah among them. But grace is at all times set against the backdrop of well-deserved wrath, for *grace that is deserved is no longer grace*, according to the Apostle Paul. It is eminently reasonable, especially to anyone who is able to read the Bible with eyes that have been granted gracious light, that Moses seeks to establish the fallen nature of Seth prior to recounting the gracious 'glory' of this particular lineage of antediluvian patriarchs. Lest anyone mistakenly think that Seth was somehow created without sin – in the pristine *imago Dei* that was Adam's before his fall – Moses utilizes this remarkable and ironic phrase: "*and he begot a son in his own likeness.*"

This is not to say that Seth and his descendants no longer possessed the image of God. We will read that Man remains in possession of the *imago Dei* even after the Flood (Genesis 9:6). Rather this enigmatic phrase begins to indicate the genetic procession of sin through the human race, and serves as an important – though often overlooked – plank within a biblical anthropology. Adam "transmitted the image of God in which he was created, not in the purity in which it came direct from God, but in the form given to it by his own self-determination, modified and corrupted by sin."<sup>150</sup> This passage lends support to the *traducian* view of the transmission of sin across generations, though a thorough discussion of the point is beyond the scope of this study in Genesis.<sup>151</sup> Suffice it to say that we begin the history of redemption with Seth, a man

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<sup>150</sup> Keil & Delitzsch; 124.

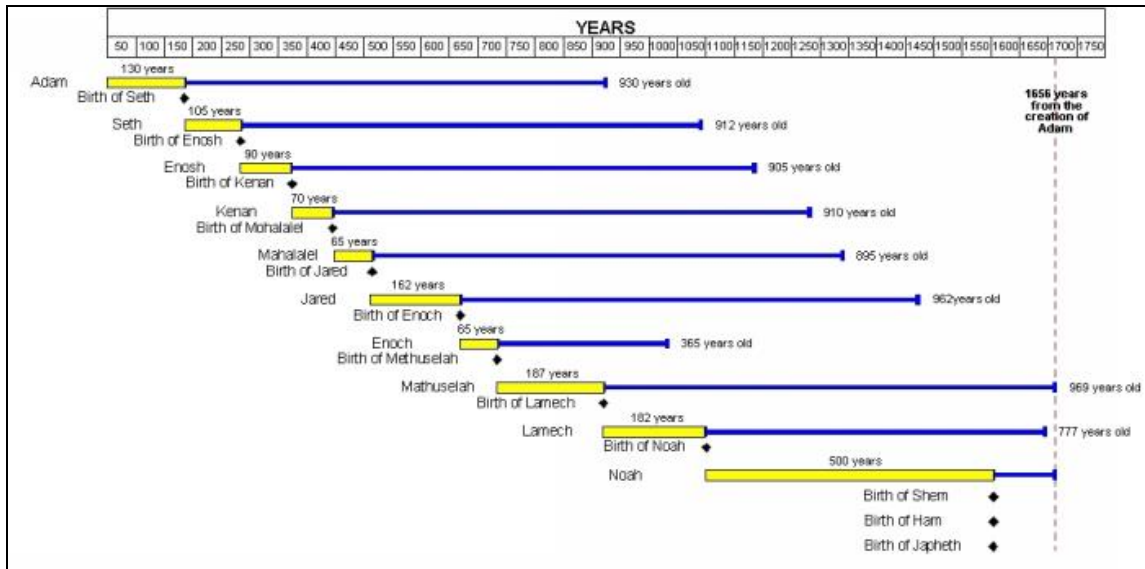
<sup>151</sup> A more detailed investigation of the various views concerning the transmission of Original Sin belongs to the Systematic Theology session, *Man & Sin*, for which a study in Genesis is an excellent prolegomena.

“conceived in iniquity and born in sin,” as are all men, both elect and reprobate, save the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

*Then the days of Adam after he became the father of Seth were eight hundred years, and he had other sons and daughters. So all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years, and he died.* (5:4-5)

This is the pattern that will be followed through most of Genesis Chapter 5, with the notable exceptions of Enoch and Noah, to whom more attention must be given in their place. It is evident from the repeated formula that the author is setting forth a genealogical record of one branch of the original family, from which it is assumed that certain ‘calculations’ may be made. If we assume that the ten generations listed here from Adam to Noah are, in fact, consecutive, then we are able to calculate the time elapsed from Creation to the Flood. Using the Hebrew Masoretic text, from which most English translations are derived, that number is 1,656 years.<sup>152</sup>

Perhaps more importantly to the author, we may calculate the duration of each man’s life relative to the other men. Thus we conclude that at the time of Enoch’s translation only Adam had died, though the first man had lived about



<sup>152</sup> The analysis is complicated by the fact that other ancient versions of this chapter, notably the Septuagint and the Samaritan Aramaic, have different numbers for the ages of the patriarchs, both at the birth of the son mentioned and the total number of years lived.

200 years into the life of Methuselah. Noah would have missed both Adam and Enoch, but would have been able to discuss the events of mankind's nascent history with all of the other antediluvian patriarchs back to his great-great-great-great-great-great-grandfather Seth. The preservation of Noah and three of his sons through the Flood, and the continuation of extended longevity – though greatly reduced – after the Flood, meant the continued correspondence of the generations. “Adam could have discussed his experiences with Methuselah...Methuselah could have discussed this information with Shem for 98 years. And Shem was a contemporary of Abraham for 150 years.”<sup>153</sup> Thus the oral tradition of the Fall and of the events leading up to the Flood and beyond would have had the tremendous validating benefit of these long-lived patriarchs still being around – as was Utnapishtim in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* – to verify the facts.

One final note of trivia derived from this chapter and the years allotted to each patriarch. It is widely considered that Methuselah is the oldest man recorded, as his age at death of 969 years is longer than any other man listed in Genesis 5. However, one must make allowance for the fact that Adam was created in full maturity – or at least that seems to be the indication of the Creation Account – which from subsequent biblical narratives would seem to be around thirty years of age. This does not bring Adam up to the age of Methuselah at the year of their respective deaths, but it moves Adam up the list a bit, at least.

What is significant, of course, is that Adam *died*. Though the physical repercussion of the Fall was delayed nearly a millennium, it was nonetheless sure and inevitable. Life had already been given up through murder, and one may assume that accidents also happened during this long interval of early human history, but as far as we are told no man had died of ‘natural’ causes until the demise of Adam. Nine hundred thirty years after his creation from the dust

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<sup>153</sup> Custance, *op cit.*; 74.

of the ground, Adam returned to it. This event might have come as a shock to the system of the surviving patriarchs, who may have begun to believe that while their lives were mortal, they still approached immortality through very long duration. Adam was the first domino to fall, the first to pay the wages of sin to which he himself had indebted his posterity. But with Adam the refrain becomes commonplace: *"and he died."*

*Seth lived one hundred and five years, and became the father of Enosh. Then Seth lived eight hundred and seven years after he became the father of Enosh, and he had other sons and daughters. So all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years, and he died. Enosh lived ninety years, and became the father of Kenan. Then Enosh lived eight hundred and fifteen years after he became the father of Kenan, and he had other sons and daughters. So all the days of Enosh were nine hundred and five years, and he died. Kenan lived seventy years, and became the father of Mahalalel. Then Kenan lived eight hundred and forty years after he became the father of Mahalalel, and he had other sons and daughters. So all the days of Kenan were nine hundred and ten years, and he died. Mahalalel lived sixty-five years, and became the father of Jared. Then Mahalalel lived eight hundred and thirty years after he became the father of Jared, and he had other sons and daughters. So all the days of Mahalalel were eight hundred and ninety-five years, and he died. Jared lived one hundred and sixty-two years, and became the father of Enoch. Then Jared lived eight hundred years after he became the father of Enoch, and he had other sons and daughters. So all the days of Jared were nine hundred and sixty-two years, and he died... Methuselah lived one hundred and eighty-seven years, and became the father of Lamech. Then Methuselah lived seven hundred and eighty-two years after he became the father of Lamech, and he had other sons and daughters. So all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred and sixty-nine years, and he died. (5:6-27)*

Here is the bulk of the genealogy, with no other modification in the formula than the names of the patriarchs and the ages at the birth of their notable sons, as well as the overall years of their lives. Again, it is unreasonable to conclude that these men lived so long on the earth before having their first child. This is especially true considering both the divine ordinance and the practical necessity of *"be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth."* These men had many sons and daughters, but in the divine redemptive historical plan the sons listed here are the ones that 'mattered.' This does not mean that no other men were faithful, that no other men were saved, during the sixteen centuries from Creation to the Flood. It merely traces the lineage of redemption, beginning the path that would

culminate in the coming of Jesus Christ, the Seed of Woman who would bruise the serpent's head.

It was noted briefly in our analysis of Genesis Chapter 4, that such chronological reporting is completely absent from the lineage of Adam through his son Cain. It is clear that the reader is meant to compare the two branches of the Adamic family - the patterns of seven and three (Genesis 4) and ten and three (Genesis 5) have already been noted, as well as the direct comparison between the two place holders in the seventh generation, Lamech of Cain and Enoch of Seth. But such a comparison raises the question as to why we are told what some of the descendants of Cain did for a living, but not how long they lived, while we are told nothing of what the Sethites did while on this earth, though we are told how long they were here.

The simplest explanation of this conundrum is to realize the true orientation of the two branches: that of Cain was "*of the earth, earthy*" as Paul puts it, that of Seth was heavenly, "*for our citizenship is from heaven.*" The race of Cain had no interest in the promised salvation or of eternal life; theirs was to live and die on earth and of the earth, and as we will discover in the sequel beginning in Chapter 6, their future on earth was to be short-lived. On the other hand, the lineage of hope and faith - the line of Seth as it is traced in Genesis 5 - represents the beginning of a branch of the human race of which the Bible speaks as *aliens and sojourners*, pilgrims who are just passing through. Thus the years of the lives of these antediluvian patriarchs is not to be viewed so much as the time from their birth to their death, but rather the time of their sojourn, as life on earth is for every child of God. We, too, are just passing through.



*Enoch lived sixty-five years, and became the father of Methuselah. Then Enoch walked with God three hundred years after he became the father of Methuselah, and he had other sons and daughters. So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.* (5:21-24)

The centerpiece of Chapter 5 is, of course, Enoch. Except for the narrative concerning Lamech and the birth of Noah, the section regarding Enoch is the only departure from the formula “*He lived...he became the father of...he died.*” We have already had occasion to note the correspondence between Enoch and Lamech of Cain, the representatives of their respective branches of the Adamic line, each the seventh in their line. The disparity in character between the two could not be more stark, and that is the point being made by the author (and, of course, the Holy Spirit under whose inspiration the author wrote). “In Enoch, the seventh from Adam through Seth, godliness attained its highest point; whilst ungodliness culminated in Lamech, the seventh from Adam through Cain, who made his sword his god.”<sup>154</sup> Though less is written within the context of Genesis about Enoch than Lamech of Cain, far more may be said of him overall. Enoch made an impression upon the religious consciousness of the people of God, and his memory is recounted frequently within the Old Covenant community of Israel and within the New Testament Church.

The things that are said about Enoch – of which more below – are remarkable considering the paucity of words employed by Moses with regard to this antediluvian saint. All we are told is that Enoch “*walked with God*” and that “*he was not, for God took him.*” The phrase ‘walked with God’ is used with reference to Enoch and Noah alone among all the characters of the Bible, and it is apparent that it signifies a remarkable communion with the Lord. Delitzsch calls it “the most intimate communion and closest intercourse with the Deity.”<sup>155</sup> Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, borrowing no doubt from what is said of Enoch by the author of Hebrews and/or Jude, write that Enoch was “not only leading a

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<sup>154</sup> Keil & Delitzsch; 125.

<sup>155</sup> Delitzsch; 217.

prophetic life, spent in immediate converse with the spiritual world, but cultivating a habitual and exalted tone of sanctified character – that of a man who lived by faith in the Unseen; and who, though an inhabitant of earth, had his conversation in heaven.”<sup>156</sup>

The correspondence between Enoch and Lamech in the seventh generation from Adam is evidently meant to highlight not only the extremes of wickedness and godliness represented by the two men, but also to contrast the human *boast* in the power of life and death, with the real possession of that power by the omnipotent God. The translation of Enoch was a signal example of immortality of the soul, especially of the soul made righteous by grace. It is a foretaste not only of the resurrection, but of the translation of those who remain alive at Christ’s second coming. *“For I tell you a mystery, we shall not all sleep but we shall all be changed...”*<sup>157</sup> The translation of Enoch, as well as that of Elijah much later, serve as witnesses that physical death is not required in order to the laying aside of this ‘body of death,’ though it would be by far the common path that the children of God would take.

Since, in the translation of Enoch, an example of immortality was exhibited; there is no doubt that God designed to elevate the minds of his saints with certain faith before their death; and to mitigate, by this consolation, the dread which they might entertain of death, seeing they would know that a better life was elsewhere laid up for them.<sup>158</sup>

The timing of Enoch’s translation is also significant; at least the order of events in relationship to the lives of the other antediluvian patriarchs. At the time of Enoch’s being ‘taken up’ only Adam had died among these ten generations, while all but Noah were alive to witness the ‘disappearance’ of the most godly of their number. The impression made by Adam’s death might have discouraged the survivors; but Enoch’s translation, when compared with the

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<sup>156</sup> Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown; 81.

<sup>157</sup> I Cor. 15:51

<sup>158</sup> Calvin; 231.

manner of Enoch's life, could serve only to encourage them in their pursuit of godliness.

We are not told by Moses what exactly constituted Enoch's holy life. It is apparent, however, from other biblical references to him and by the wider tradition surrounding him, that Enoch's life was not one of a recluse, quietly spending his days in meditation and contemplation until finally he received his reward of the *beatific vision*. Indeed, Jude's account of Enoch's life makes it fairly clear that his absence was noteworthy in his own time – most likely Enoch's departure could not have been missed, and was probably news received with great joy by the wicked.

*It was also about these men that Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him."* (Jude 14-15)

This could not have been a popular message to the generation of Lamech! Jude is obviously referencing a tradition with regard to Enoch that is not derived from the Genesis account, for nothing is said here of Enoch's ministry. Jude appears to be referencing the apocryphal Book of Enoch (also known as Ethiopian Enoch or I Enoch), where we read in the first chapter,

The word of the blessing of Enoch, how he blessed the elect and the righteous, who were to exist in the time of trouble; rejecting all the wicked and ungodly. Enoch, a righteous man, who *was* with God, answered and spoke, while his eyes were open, and *while* he saw a holy vision in the heavens. This the angels showed me...Great fear and trembling shall seize them, even to the ends of the earth. The lofty mountains shall be troubled, and the exalted hills depressed, melting like a honeycomb in the flame. The earth shall be immerged, and all things which are in it perish; while judgment shall come upon all, even upon all the righteous...Behold, he comes with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon them, and destroy the wicked, and reprove all the carnal for

everything which the sinful and ungodly have done, and committed against him.<sup>159</sup>

Jude's quotation from the Book of Enoch within his own inspired letter does not confirm the authority of inspiration upon the apocryphal book, nor does it diminish the authority of Jude's letter. Rather it establishes as a valid tradition of long standing among the Jewish people, that Enoch was, as Noah, a 'preacher of righteousness' and a prophet of the judgment that was soon to come upon that godless generation. The language used by Enoch is the language of the prophet, showing that God's intervention into human history in judgment does not necessarily imply the ultimate end of the age and Final Judgment. It is fairly obvious that the 'judgment' of which Enoch spoke was that of the Flood, not that of the Second Coming of Christ. "The doctrine of the Day of Judgment was, therefore, a doctrine of the Church before the Flood."<sup>160</sup>

The fundamental component of Enoch's righteous walk, however, was not that he was a prophet but rather that he was a believer. This is the testimony of the author of Hebrews, where Enoch is numbered among the giants of the faith in Chapter 11. "*By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; AND HE WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD TOOK HIM UP; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God.*"<sup>161</sup> It is immediately after this reference that the writer of Hebrews states the basic formula of true worship, "*And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.*"<sup>162</sup> We have had occasion to discuss the conjecture of faith with regard to Adam and Eve, and to notice the apparent lack of repentance in either. Though nothing is said of repentance in relation to Enoch, either, this necessary concomitant of faith is not absent from the legacy of Enoch, as we read from the apocryphal book Ecclesiasticus,

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<sup>159</sup> <http://www.reluctant-messenger.com/1enoch01-60.htm#Chapter01>

<sup>160</sup> Cynddylan Jone; 346.

<sup>161</sup> Hebrews 11:5

<sup>162</sup> Hebrews 11:6

Enoch pleased the Lord, and was translated, being an example of repentance to all generations.<sup>163</sup>

*Lamech lived one hundred and eighty-two years, and became the father of a son. Now he called his name Noah, saying, "This one will give us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands arising from the ground which the LORD has cursed." Then Lamech lived five hundred and ninety-five years after he became the father of Noah, and he had other sons and daughters. So all the days of Lamech were seven hundred and seventy-seven years, and he died.* (5:28-31)

Both Lamechs in the early chapters of Genesis are given speeches – the Sword Song of Lamech of Cain, and the *Nunc Dimittis* of Lamech of Seth.<sup>164</sup> Lamech the father of Noah utters a prophecy – or at least it appears to be a prophecy – that the sequel does not seem to fulfill in quite the manner he intended. The name ‘Noah’ is derived from a Hebrew root that can mean either ‘rest’ or ‘comfort,’ and the signification given to the name by Lamech is the anticipation of some relief coming by means of this child, from the hardship of toil due to the divine curse upon the ground. Commentators have struggled to connect Lamech’s prophetic utterance (or hope?) with the event to follow in the narrative: it is hard to extract ‘rest’ and ‘comfort’ from a catastrophic deluge.

We know from subsequent revelation that Noah was a ‘preacher of righteousness,’ and from Genesis that he also ‘walked with God.’ Thus we may conclude that Lamech’s prophetic assessment of the character of his son, at least, was not wide of the mark. What remains to be seen is whether the father’s anticipation of the outcome of his son’s life would also come to pass. If we accept the general English translation of Noah’s name as ‘rest’ or ‘comfort’ it remains hard to see how Lamech’s hopes might have come to fruition through the life and ministry of Noah. But Delitzsch notes that the Hebrew root of the name, as with most Hebrew roots, bears many nuances, including that of

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<sup>163</sup> Ecclesiasticus XLIV.

<sup>164</sup> The common *Nunc Dimittis* is that of Simeon as recorded in Luke Chapter 2, “*Now let Thy servant depart...*” but the phrase is generic and characterizes any exclamation of comfort and praise for the apparent deliverance brought by God.

‘breathing new life’ in to something.<sup>165</sup> “Lamech hopes that his son is the man who will introduce a turn for the better. And he was not deceived.”<sup>166</sup>

There must be some interpolation made in our exegesis of this passage, moving not only within the pericope itself, but a bit farther on into Chapter 6. Two aspects of the narrative tease us as to the depth of meaning in Lamech’s prophecy. The first is Lamech’s age at the time of his death: 777 years. Many commentators focus on the numerology of this age – three sevens, triple completion or perfection, it is alleged. But there is a greater problem here; that is the fact that Lamech dies *before* his father Methuselah (see chart page 116). The death of a son before the father was universally interpreted in the ancient world as indication of the wickedness of the son, unless of course the son’s death was by violent means. We have no reason to suspect Lamech of Seth was a wicked man, and his prophetic naming of Noah seems to confirm his own connection with the divine history of the Fall of Man, in a believing and hopeful way.

Moving into the opening verses of Chapter 6 we find that the wickedness of man had grown intolerable even to God.

*Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.* (Genesis 6:6)

What is intolerable and grievous to God must also be to God’s children, and the intense wickedness of mankind must have been an unbearable burden to the lineage of Seth – to prophets of judgment like Enoch and to preachers of righteousness like Noah, but also to the less well-known of their race: men like Lamech the father of Noah. We cannot explain Lamech’s ‘untimely’ death with any dogmatism, but it is not unreasonable to conclude that it was met violently, for Lamech lived in and lamented a violent world. From this world the Lord would indeed give relief, through Lamech’s son Noah.

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<sup>165</sup> Delitzsch; 219.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*; 220.

**Week 8:                    Only Evil Always**

**Text Reading:        Genesis 5:32 – 6:8**

*“There is no fear of God before his eyes”  
(Psalm 36:1)*

The passage before us in this study presents several significant hermeneutical challenges, the solutions to which have not been universally agreed upon within either Jewish or Christian exegetical history. The identity of the ‘sons of God’ in 6:2, for instance, along with the meaning of the one hundred twenty years set as a limit upon mankind by the Lord (6:3). Those who hold one interpretation of these passages are no less convinced in their minds than those who hold mutually exclusive interpretations, and each camp seems to find biblical support for their conclusions. Thus we are presented with another excellent workshop in hermeneutics in Genesis 6, and an opportunity to employ sound exegetical methods to a controversial – though not critical – passage of Scripture.<sup>167</sup>

From an overview perspective, it should be noted that certain interpretations of the ‘sons of God’ passage tend to move quickly to other parts of Scripture well beyond Genesis 6, and even beyond the Pentateuch. The methodology is itself fair: to compare the same phrase as it is used elsewhere, but the priority given to it is wrong. The immediate context should always govern; the interpretation of any pericope should be sought within the flow of the chapter and book in which it is located *before* venturing radially out from that point. Hence what a phrase means in the Book of Job – itself an example of the Wisdom genre – might not apply to the same phrase in the Book of Genesis. Indeed, the meaning of a phrase elsewhere in the Bible does not trump the clear

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<sup>167</sup> By ‘not critical’ all that is meant is that the outcome of the exegetical study does not impinge directly upon central tenets of the Christian faith. In some respect, the discussion is ‘academic’ rather than ‘doctrinal.’ Still, developing a good hermeneutic has immediate benefit for all passages of Scripture.

sense of that phrase in the immediate context, if that sense can be established clearly.

Thus we begin this study with a brief recapitulation from the last lesson with regard to the *toledoth* – the ‘generations’ markers found in the Book of Genesis. The point to be made here, as we remember Moses’ frequent use of this word as a heading for each new section of his writing, is that we are still in the *toledoth* of Genesis 5:1 and will remain so – in spite of the chapter division – until Genesis 6:8. It is not until verse 9 of this chapter that we arrive at the next division heading: “*These are the records of the generations (toledoth) of Noah...*” Thus we ought to seek our understanding of the enigmatic phrases in the early verses of Chapter 6, not from the Book of Job, but from within the pericope established by Moses’ *toledoth*.

Another hermeneutical principle that comes into play here is that of biblical consistency. The principle is simple and clear: an interpretation of one part of Scripture may not contradict or annul a different part of Scripture. As it applies here in Genesis 6, we have the assertion of purely spiritual beings doing things that elsewhere it is denied them the ability to do: to procreate. Scripture must interpret Scripture; and in doing so it can never contradict itself. The best interpretation, which admittedly may not be the most exciting, is the one that best accords with the rest of the Bible, and in no place contradicts it.

Also in this passage we have the presaging of a new order of mankind: the re-establishment of the race through one man – saved, not newly created – through three sons. The pattern is repetitive, actually, for of Adam’s immediate family only three sons are mentioned as significant to redemptive history: Cain, Abel, and Seth, though we are told Adam had many other sons and daughters. With Noah the situation is more restricted: we are led to believe that Shem, Japheth, and Ham were Noah’s only sons, and only children. It is not critical to the meaning of the narrative that this be the case, but we certainly have no biblical grounds for supposing that Noah’s family was any larger than the



members mentioned explicitly in this and the next *toledoth*. The world beyond the flood would be set within its historical course according the three sons of Noah, and subsequent redemptive and secular history would follow the channels thus laid down here in Genesis 6.

*Noah was five hundred years old, and Noah became the father of Shem, Ham, and Japheth.* (5:32)

We have seen in our analysis of Genesis 4 that this conclusion to the ten-generation lineage of Adam through Seth has its parallel to the seven-generation record of Adam's posterity through Cain. The latter line is summed up with Lamech in the seventh generation, along with his three sons. Here the line is summed up with Noah, the tenth from Adam, and *his* three sons. The structure is literary, though that need not detract or diminish the historicity of the genealogies. Lamech may have had more sons, and so may have Noah; that issue is not pertinent to the author's intent, which is to develop the lineage of rebellion alongside that of redemption.

That the passage is not to be taken with strict chronological literalness is made clear upon further reading with regard to Noah's three sons. They were not triplets, as the wording in 5:32 might seem to indicate. Shem was the older brother of Japheth (Genesis 10:21), and Ham was the youngest of the three (Genesis 9:24). Thus, though the three sons are listed as 'Shem, Ham, and Japheth' in Genesis 5:32, and again in Chapter 6, verses 10 and 18, their birth order was Shem, Japheth, and Ham.<sup>168</sup> Thus also the mention of Noah as being five hundred years old, in relation to the advent of his three sons into the world, appears to be a generalization. Noah was, in fact, approximately 502 years old when Shem was born; we do not know the relative ages of Japheth and Ham to Shem, so we do not know how old their father was at their births. We establish the age of Noah at Shem's birth as follows,

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<sup>168</sup> The King James & New King James versions render Genesis 10:21, "*Unto Shem also...the brother of Japheth the elder...*"; hence some commentators place Japheth at the head of the list.

Noah was six hundred years old when the flood began (7:6)  
 Shem was one hundred years old when Arpachshad was born (11:10)  
 Arpachshad was born two years after the flood (11:10)  
 Shem was thus ninety-eight years old at the time of the flood  
 Noah was  $600 - 98 = 502$  years old when Shem was born.<sup>169</sup>

These calculations are more than just an academic curiosity, for they impinge upon the sense of Genesis 5:32, which itself impacts our interpretation of the 'one hundred twenty years' of Genesis 6:3. Unfortunately there is no clear indication of what Moses intended to convey by telling us that Noah was five hundred years old (5:32). What was the significance of his five hundredth year? His forefathers were reported to the ones' place as to their age at the birth of the significant son (Lamech, for instance, was 182 years old when Noah was born), so there is no apparent reason for this 'rounding off' to five hundred in Noah's case. Noah was 595 years old when his father Lamech died so apparently prematurely, so this cannot be the significance of Noah's 500<sup>th</sup> year. And we have just seen that Noah was 502 years old, not 500, when Shem was born.

The only reasonable solution is that the rendering of Genesis 10:21 in the King James Version is the correct interpretation of the relative relationship between Shem and Japheth: Japheth was the older brother of the three. If this is the case, then Noah's five hundredth year was the *terminus a quo* of his 'begetting' of three sons, starting that year with Japheth, followed two years later by Shem, and then sometime later by Ham.<sup>170</sup> Given the specificity of the ages of the antediluvian patriarchs at the birth of their significant son, it is best to maintain that specificity with Noah, if at all possible, which this particular rendering of the Hebrew of Genesis 10:21 allows us to do.

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<sup>169</sup> This is still approximate, for we don't know if 'after the flood' in 11:10 means after the flood started or after the flood ended, or after Noah and his family departed from the ark. Taking the phrase to mean the commencement of the flood gives us the *youngest* that Noah would have been at the birth of Shem. Finer calculations must be left to those who have nothing better to do with their time.

<sup>170</sup> This is the general handling of the various passages taken by Delitzsch and Ainsworth; most other commentators do not address the issue at all.

The grouping of the sons together, however, is an unusual and significant feature of Genesis 5:32, and is repeated several other places in the sequel. Shem, though apparently the second-born, is given precedence in each mention due to his covenant significance (*cp.* Genesis 9:26 where the LORD is called '*the God of Shem*'). Ham is mentioned next, perhaps as the antithesis of Shem which he was, with Japheth the eldest bringing up the rear. We will have occasion as we investigate the Table of Nations beginning in Chapter 10, to further realize the importance of this threefold division of post-flood human history. Suffice it to say at this introductory stage, that the division of mankind into three distinct racial, ethnic, and linguistic (and *especially* linguistic) branches is a well established phenomenon in both Christian and secular anthropological and philological research. The subsequent flow of human history strongly supports what we read in Genesis 5:32 and beyond.

*Now it came about, when men began to multiply on the face of the land, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose.* (6:1-2)

We arrive, of course, at one of the most enigmatic and controversial passages of Scripture: the intermarriage of the 'sons of God' and the 'daughters of men.' The interpretation of this passage has followed two broad lines of identification concerning the 'sons of God' – either that they are angelic beings, or that they are men, in particular, the lineage of Seth. Each exegetical conclusion has notable support within both Jewish and Christian scholarship, with the former being the opinion of the earliest Church Fathers, and the latter espoused vigorously by Augustine and Jerome, as well as the Reformers. If we can lay aside preconceived notions, let us approach the passage afresh.

The key here is the evolved wickedness of mankind derived from Man's increased population – and hence intercourse – on the earth. Mankind '*multiplied upon the face of the earth.*' Considering the longevity of man – represented perhaps in its extreme by the lineage of Seth – it is not surprising that the

population at least of the region 'east of Eden' would grow exponentially over the passing decades and centuries. As far as we have been told, there is no constraint upon man's behavior; no 'giving of the Law' for instance, no manifestation of divine common grace inhibiting man from being as inveterate a sinner as he may be. Instead we are told, in a few verses, that mankind's depravity has reached to the very thoughts and intentions of his heart, which are "*only evil always.*" Man, it may be said, had grown as bad as he could be. But even that is not the straw that broke the back of divine long-suffering. This came, apparently from the text we read, through the intermarriage of two distinct - and theoretically incompatible - groups of beings: the "*sons of God*" and the "*daughters of men.*" It seems clear that there is the rub; that these two groups should marry and procreate is just too much for the patience of God to endure.

But who are represented by these two phrases, "*the sons of God*" and "*the daughters of men*"? Commentaries on this passage from ancient rabbinic sources, early Church Fathers, and Reformation and Post-Reformation evangelical writers display a multiplicity of nuance on basically two interpretive variants: the one being that the 'sons of God' are angelic beings; the other that these are fully human beings. "This problematic expression has been defined as Sethites, angels, or a dynasty of tyrants who succeed Lamech. All three interpretations can be defended from the Hebrew grammar."<sup>171</sup> On the phrase "*daughters of men*" the interpretative gamut runs from the daughters of the Sethite line, the daughters of mankind in general or the Cainite line in particular, to the daughters of a non-Adamic human race thus far unmentioned in Genesis. There has been no lack of disagreement and controversy over the interpretation of this verse!

Are the 'sons of God' angelic beings? The primary defense for this view is the same phrase being used in Job 1 with apparent reference to the angels as presented before the Lord God,

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<sup>171</sup> Waltke; *Genesis: A Commentary*; 115.

*Now there was a day when the **sons of God** came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them.* (Job 1:6)

It is also argued that these corrupt and corrupting angels are those of whom Jude speaks in his short letter, though frankly there is no provable connection between the two passages,

*And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day...* (Jude 6)

Closer to the home context of Genesis 6, the view of the 'sons of God' being angelic is seen to explain the *Nephilim* mentioned in just a few verses,

*The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown.* (6:4)

As we will see in our exegesis of this verse below, it does not state that the *Nephilim were the result* of the marriages between the 'sons of God' and the 'daughters of men.' In fact, it seems most clearly to state that this other group of men were present both before and after the unholy alliances were contracted. In any event, the mention of the *Nephilim* fails to prove anything with reference to the identity of the first two groups from verse 2, and can only be joined to the previous verse in a causal relationship by means of an *a priori* conclusion. We are left to discover the identity of the 'sons of God' and the 'daughters of men' by other methods. First, a brief discussion on the defense of the view that the 'sons of God' are angelic beings.

This view was widely held among both Second Temple rabbinic writers and the Apostolic Fathers and Apologists of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Century church. More recently, biblical scholars as notable as Franz Delitzsch (19<sup>th</sup> Century) and Bruce Waltke (20<sup>th</sup> Century) maintain the angelic identification of the 'sons of God,' though each with a similar modification. The basic argument, premised on

the identification of the 'sons of God' in Job 1, is that the angels who were left to guard the entrance to Eden began to be seduced by the beauty of human women, and thus contracted marriages with these women. It is to be noted that the Hebrew in verse 2 is quite clear that we are talking about *marriages*, and not merely sexual intercourse between the two groups – these were entering into long-lasting relationships, the result of which was a further deepening of the wickedness of mankind prior to the Flood.

Delitzsch freely admits that the marital relationship between a spiritual angelic being and a human woman is untenable on biblical grounds, so he (and Bruce Waltke as well) offers an intriguing solution: demon possession. Delitzsch writes,

The narrative as it runs would hence mean, not merely single acts of intercourse, but lasting and, with respect to the angels, unnatural relations with women...To make this to a certain degree conceivable, we must admit an assumption of human bodies by angels; and hence not merely transitory appearances of angels in human form, but actual angelic incarnation...They were dæmons who accomplished what is here narrated, by means of men whom they made their instruments, *i.e.*, through demoniacs, who with demoniacal violence drew women within the radius of their enchantments and made them subserve the purpose of their sensual lusts.<sup>172</sup>

What is significant about Delitzsch's analysis is the admission – on the basis of Matthew 22:30, which Delitzsch himself references – that angels do not marry and, by logical consequence, do not procreate. Delitzsch and Waltke, while maintaining on philological grounds the necessity of interpreting 'sons of God' as angelic beings, must, due to their faithfulness to the whole counsel of Scripture, admit that such a marital relationship between angels and human women is impossible. It is contrary to the nature of angels as purely spiritual beings, to enter into and consummate a marriage with humans. Thus these two commentators cut the Gordian Knot by inserting demoniacs – demon-possessed

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<sup>172</sup> Delitzsch; 225-226.

men – in the place of ‘sons of God.’ This is perhaps the oddest interpretation of that phrase that can be imagined! Demons called ‘sons of God’! In any event, the solution is not a solution, for the ‘sons of God’ are still but men, though possessed by spiritual powers, and their union with the ‘daughters of men’ does not explain or justify the divine reaction against all mankind.

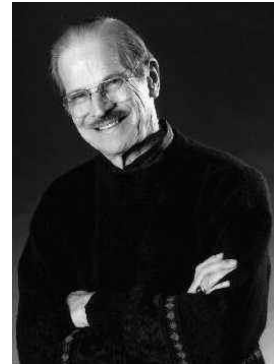
This last comment cuts to the heart of the issue, and shows that context will guide the biblical student in the right direction, where philology (word and phrase studies) will lead astray. Within the immediate context it must be noted that *only* men are addressed as culprits; only *men* whose “*thoughts and intentions are only evil always.*” No mention is made of angels at all (nor has there been anything said regarding the origin or nature of angels in the previous chapters. While it has been argued that the angels are left out of the judgment due to Moses’ focus on the predicament of mankind, this fails to satisfy when one considers the harsh rebuke and curse issued upon Satan for his role in Man’s original Fall. If God saw fit to include the angelic being within the compass of His judgment there, it stands to reason that He would do so here as well.

A cursory overview of the immediate passage will show that only men are concerned here; the introduction of angelic beings into the equation is unwarranted and confusing. “The entire context of this passage refers to *men* as having corrupted their ways, and being, by the withdrawal of God’s Spirit, doomed to punishment.”<sup>173</sup> Note that *men* are multiplying upon the face of the earth, to which multitude of men are born a multitude of apparently beautiful women (6:1). It is *man* with whom God’s Spirit will not strive forever, for it is *man* who is flesh (6:3) and whose thoughts and intentions are only evil always (6:5). As a result of the divine analysis and judgment, it is *man* who will be blotted out from the face of the land (6:7). Thus to introduce angelic beings into the narrative is to do violence to the flow of the text itself, and to add a

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<sup>173</sup> Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown; 87.

component of complexity that is both unjustified and unnecessary. Gleason Archer, in his *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, writes, “While they [*i.e.*, angels] may on occasion appear in bodily form in the semblance of men, they have no physical bodies, and are therefore utterly incapable of carnal relations with women. The rabbinic speculation that angels are referred to in Genesis 6:2 is a curious intrusion of pagan superstition that has no basis at all in the rest of Scripture.<sup>174</sup> The incorporation of marriages between angels and humans into Genesis 6 has far more affinity with pagan mythology, where such unions are commonplace, than with Scripture. John Davis comments,



Gleason Archer (1916-2004)

The uniform representation of Scripture elsewhere is that the passions of demons, irrespective of the form of wickedness into which they may drive the possessed, and the emotions of unfallen angels are without exception spiritual, not carnal. It is doctrine novel to Scripture that woman’s beauty could arouse animal love in angel or demon.<sup>175</sup>

Hopefully the issue is fully and finally settled with the words of our Lord himself,

*But Jesus answered and said to them, “You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection **they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.***

(Matthew 22:29-30)

What is presented in the opening verses of Chapter 6 is a phenomenon that is consistently repugnant to God and consistently brings forth His judgment upon His people: the intermarriage of those whom He has separated to himself with those who have rejected Him. “What Genesis 6:1-2,4 records is the first occurrence of mixed marriage between believers and unbelievers, with the characteristic result of such unions: complete loss of testimony for the Lord and a

<sup>174</sup> Archer, Gleason *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan; 1982); 79.

<sup>175</sup> Davis *Genesis and Semitic Tradition*; 104.



total surrender of moral standards.”<sup>176</sup> That the apostasy of the Sethite line is here intended is further confirmed by the statement in verse 8 that “*Noah found favor in the eyes of God.*” After a comprehensive condemnation of mankind, only Noah is found faithful and worthy of preservation, a preservation that will extend providentially to his sons as well.

That the ‘sons of God’ in verse 2 are the descendants of Seth is a conclusion that fits most naturally with the flow of the preceding chapters, wherein the wicked lineage of Cain is recounted up to violent Lamech (Chapter 4) and the faithful lineage of Seth provided up to righteous Noah. Cynddylan Jones writes, “The view, therefore, which commends itself to my judgment is the simple one, for which the preceding chapters have prepared us.”<sup>177</sup> There are too many passages in Scripture to enumerate here, in which the faithful are denominated ‘sons’ or ‘offspring’ or ‘children’ of God, for there to be any doubt of the phrase’s propriety here in regard to the descendants of Seth according to the ‘covenant’ genealogy.<sup>178</sup>

The meaning of the clause under notice, then, is that the professedly religious class of the antediluvians, consisting principally of Sethites...a class who, by their principles and practice, had long kept themselves separate from the world – began gradually to relax their strictness, and to abandon their isolated position, by cultivating acquaintance, and then forming alliances, with ‘the daughters of me’ in general, the Cainite and other women of similar character.<sup>179</sup>

The doctrinal and practical import of this exegetical conclusion is to show the centrality of the concept of ‘separatedness’ of the people of God even among those who lived before the Flood. The concept “*come out from among them and be separate*” was not restricted solely to Israel, and though it is not found explicitly enjoined upon the Sethites, the very nature of a sanctified believing life within a

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<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*; 80.

<sup>177</sup> Cynddylan Jones; 361.

<sup>178</sup> *Cp.* Hos. 11:1; Ex. 4:22; Deut. 14:1, 32:19; Isa. 43:6, 45:11; Judg. 20:2; Psa. 73:15.

<sup>179</sup> Jaimeson, Fausset, & Brown; 88.

world corrupt with sin demands its application to the antediluvians. “Mixed marriages between parties of opposite principle and practice must necessarily be sources of extensive corruption.”<sup>180</sup> Cynddylan Jones adds, “The line of Cain and the line of Seth are seen to coalesce and intermingle, and thereby the last rampart against ungodliness is swept away.”<sup>181</sup> To put it according to Paul’s maxim, “*Bad company corrupts good morals.*” Corruption does not retreat before righteousness; the direction of flow is downhill all the way.

*Then the LORD said, “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.”* (6:3)

This is another difficult passage, and again the problems arise with identification. Here, however, the Hebrew wording is also difficult, and the rendering given above from the New American Standard version is fairly typical of English renderings for what is somewhat difficult Hebrew. “God’s speech is difficult to translate, much less to understand. Yet it is clearly a negative comment and, in context, a response to and a criticism of the deeds of the sons of God – who are, by the way, here clearly identified as human.”<sup>182</sup> It is not clear from the Hebrew how the verb rendered ‘*strive*’ ought to be translated and understood, nor what is meant by the reference to man as being ‘*also flesh*’ or ‘*indeed flesh.*’ The most common difficulty, however, revolves around what is meant by the one hundred and twenty year limitation placed upon man in this verse. Does it pertain to the life span of man? Or does it refer to the amount of time before God executes His overwhelming judgment upon mankind? As it turns out, one’s interpretation of the ‘*striving*’ of the Spirit and of man as being ‘*also flesh*’ impinge directly upon one’s conclusion with regard to the ‘*one hundred and twenty years.*’

Perhaps the most common understanding of this stipulated length of time is that it has to do with the reduction of the length of human life to one hundred and twenty years. But there are at least two serious problems with this view. The first is that it is not true to

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<sup>180</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>181</sup> Cynddylan Jones; 359.

<sup>182</sup> Kass *The Beginning of Wisdom*; 160.

the biblical record subsequent to this narrative. Those who passed through the Flood – the family of Noah – continued to live remarkably long lives, though not as long as their forefathers. Later, men such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived lives well in excess of 120 years, though it is evident that human longevity was decreasing dramatically. Only Moses himself hits the ‘magic’ number of 120 years at the time of his death, and from there the average life expectancy drops another fifty years to “*three score and ten, or if by strength four score.*”

A second problem with this interpretation is found in the immediate context, for it is quite evident that the judgment intended by God is not fulfilled by merely limiting the time that man has on earth to nurture his wickedness. The divine purpose is “*to blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land.*” Limiting man’s average life span to 120 years does not answer to this summons.

Furthermore, concluding that the 120 years refers to man’s life expectancy presupposes an interpretation of the ‘striving’ Spirit that probably does not best suit the phrase or the context. Putting the two clauses together and referencing them to the longevity of man, requires that Moses be talking about the spirit of life – the breath of life given to man – when he speaks of the divine Spirit ‘*not striving with man forever.*’ But this does not fit the sense of what is being said here. Even before this passage of judgment, the ‘spirit of life’ did not strive with man ‘forever.’ Adam died, albeit at over nine hundred years old; still, he died far short of ‘forever.’ It is by no means clear that what is being said here refers to the sustaining of human life by the divine Spirit.

The most difficult clause in this passage is, “*because he also is flesh.*” The use of the term ‘flesh’ here seems to correspond with the common usage of the term in the New Testament; in other words, referring to man’s baser nature, and particular to his bent toward sin and sensuality, “the nature of man as corrupted and degraded by the predominance of debasing lusts and unbridled passions.”<sup>183</sup> This would indeed fit the context of verses 1-2, and would justify the exhaustion of the divine patience in the following verses. The ‘striving’ of the divine Spirit, then, does not refer to the sustaining of man’s life (the sense that ‘flesh’ would have if it referred merely to corporeal existence), but rather to the on-going attempts by God to challenge, rebuke, chastise, and

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<sup>183</sup> Jaimeson, Fausset, & Brown; 89.

in some manner move man back to the paths of righteousness. This ‘striving’ is best seen as the work of the divine Spirit in the prophetic ministry of Enoch and in the preaching of Noah. “He would withdraw the services of His prophetic messengers, who had been sent to admonish and warn them, and would cease to employ any further efforts for reclaiming a people who resisted the most powerful means of conviction, giving them over to a reprobate mind.”<sup>184</sup> This interpretation has the advantage of being consistent with the pattern of punishment that God follows subsequently in the biblical history, primarily with respect to His people Israel: to withdraw the prophetic ministry as a means of judgment and wrath. It is also consistent with what we read elsewhere concerning the ministries of Enoch and Noah, from which we may infer that others instruments of divine grace were present in the world at that time, though in decreasing numbers up to the day of the Flood.

This leaves us to wrestle again with the ‘*one hundred and twenty years.*’ The most logical conclusion, in light of the foregoing analysis, is that the world was given another 120 years before the promised destruction would ensue. It may be that the number itself is stylistic – God is not in the habit of announcing the exact date and time when judgment will appear – based on a triple combination of forty years, a common length of probation elsewhere in Scripture. If the number is to be taken as an exact figure, then the prophecy itself must have come in Noah’s 480<sup>th</sup> year, as the Flood commenced in his 600<sup>th</sup> year (*cp.* Gen. 7:11).

*The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown.* (6:4)

On the basis of the Septuagint, and corroborated with the report of the Israelite spies in Numbers 13:33, the term *Nephilim* is often associated with *giant*. The word itself, however, has no bearing on physical stature but rather on political and military clout. It is derived from the Hebrew verb meaning ‘*to fall*’ or ‘*to fall upon*’ and probably has the connotation of a tyrannical portion of antediluvian society made up of wicked men who tyrannized and oppressed

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<sup>184</sup> *Idem.*

their fellow men. “The term *Nephilim* seems to bear a deeper significance; and if etymology may guide us, it describes a class of men of worthless and at the same time violent character.”<sup>185</sup> Keil adds, “they were called *Nephilim* because they fell upon the people and oppressed them.”<sup>186</sup> Their physical stature is incidental to the narrative; it cannot be definitively shown that they were giants, though without doubt they were mighty.

It is not immediately apparent why this wicked class of men are mentioned here in verse 5, although the connection with the union of the ‘sons of God’ and the ‘daughters of men’ leans strongly toward the *Nephilim* being their offspring. This, while not explicitly stated in the verse; it is strongly implied. If this is the case, then the reference here serves to intensify the overall state of wickedness present upon the earth in the years prior to the Flood. Not only had the lineage of Cain degenerated into intense ungodliness and violence – as well, undoubtedly, as all of the other descendants of Adam – so also the lineage of Seth was itself apostatizing from the faith. The intermarriages between the godly line and the ungodly has now produced a branch of the human race that was no longer mighty in the Lord, but was mighty in unrighteousness.

*Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.* (6:5)

It is important, however, to realize that the indictment was not delivered only against the *Nephilim*, but it was universal. The offense of intermarriage, along with the godless offspring resulting, were but a notable instance of a general pervasive degeneration of the entire race. Furthermore, we are here told that the *deeds* of the sons of God and the daughters of men was not even the root of the problem. Rather sin had corrupted and polluted the very *thoughts*, and even the *intent* of the thoughts – that underlying mental paradigm that governs the paths in which man’s mind travels. The author compounds words in verse 5

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<sup>185</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>186</sup> Keil & Delitzsch; 137.

in order to drive home the *total* depravity of Man. “The language implies a prodigious excess of depravity...that impious race had filled up the measure of their iniquities.”<sup>187</sup>

From a systematic theological perspective, as well as a biblical theological perspective, this passage does not assert that man prior to the Flood was somehow more of a sinner than man after the Flood. Nor is it the case that man became more depraved as time passed from the Fall to the Flood. This period of redemptive and human history presents us with a vivid portrayal of the progression of uninhibited sin within human society. This pattern has been repeated throughout the ages, but only restricted to individual tribes and nations, who cast off all moral restraint and mined deep within the utter depravity of the human heart. These are those of whom it is written, “*God gave them over...*” Mankind far advanced in active depravity relinquishes even his claim upon the common grace of God, the overarching restraint of the divine Spirit that keeps this world from descending into its self-appointed abyss before its time. From a biblical theological point of view, it appears that the advent of this common grace is to be found *after* the Flood and not before it.

*The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.* (6:6)

This is, of course, one of those verses that the Armenian and the Open Theist will point to in order to ‘prove’ that God has not firmly and finally decreed “*whatsoever comes to pass,*” but rather, that God Himself changes His mind on occasion. The problem with such an interpretation of this passage is that it flatly contradicts other passages in which God denies that He ever repents.

*God is not a man, that He should lie,  
Nor a son of man, that He should repent;  
Has He said it, and will He not do it?  
Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?* (Numbers 23:19)

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<sup>187</sup> Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown; 90.

*And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind.*  
(I Samuel 15:29)

To interpret Genesis 6:6 with crass literalness brings a charge against several of the attributes of God: His omniscience, for example; for did God not know that man would become so bad? His wisdom; is it possible that God should create, and make a mistake? His immutability; either the plan and purpose of God is eternal and unalterable, or it is mutable and capable of either failure or improvement. Standing on the firm foundation of the self-disclosed nature of God, we must find a different interpretation for the 'repentance' spoken of here with regard to God's attitude toward mankind. The solution, common elsewhere throughout Scripture, is the *anthropopathism*, or 'man-feeling.'

It is often evident in divine monologues that God is presenting His own chain of thought, as it were, in order for man to gain a deeper understanding of the divine mind and heart (which are, by the way, *anthropomorphisms*). It is an equal error of the opposite extreme that, while solidly maintaining that God is 'without parts or passions' and that He never changes His mind or repents, we come to understand God as passionless, cold, and unfeeling. We may not be able to fully comprehend how it can be, but we cannot deny that the Scriptures portray God as having emotions - or at least something that we can understand as emotions - in His interaction with His creation. To say that God is without passion is by no means to say that He is apathetic.

In one sense we may read such passages as reflecting what *man* should feel when he witnesses sin and rebellion against a holy God. The indignation, the sorrow, the wrath are all emotions that are fitting to a righteous emotional framework with respect both to the sin which remains in each one of us, and the sin which continues to cripple the world of Man. But there is more to it than just moral example: God *really* feels the grief, sorrow, and anger that He reveals in His word. We may understand that the emotions we feel are patterned - corrupt, to be sure - but patterned after the emotions that are in God. Our

emotional makeup, and the things that stimulate various emotions within our hearts, are certainly not the same as they are in God. Nonetheless, as Man is the *imago Dei*, we may be certain that the emotional structure of the human heart – no less than the rational structure of the human mind – finds its perfect origin in God. Delitzsch therefore rightly concludes,

...it is not less true, if rightly understood, that God feels repentance when He sees the original design of His love rendered vain, that He feels grief when His holy love is rejected. He is the living God, upon whom the sight of fallen man, of the deeply corrupted world, does not fail to react. Thus it is not with cold indifference that He resolves upon the destruction of the world.<sup>188</sup>

*The LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them."* (6:7)

As alluded to earlier, this is the verse that informs us that the divine punishment will not be merely the reduction of the average life span of man to one hundred and twenty years. God intends a clean slate – and that is literally what the Hebrew word translated ‘blot’ means: *to wipe clean*. Not only Man is to be removed from the face of the earth, but also all of the animal world that lives on or above the earth. Only the creatures of the sea are apparently exempted from the impending cataclysm, though undoubtedly many of them were stranded when the flood waters receded. This inclusion of the animal world along with the human as regards the divine wrath, illustrates the biblical principle of Creation: that all of Creation was made for man, and is intrinsically bound up together with man. It is the same principle that informs the Apostle Paul when he writes,

*For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to*

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<sup>188</sup> Delitzsch; 234.



*corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.*

(Romans 8:19-22)

One commentator writes, "In the usual course of Providence the lower animals are frequently involved in the calamities that befall man, such as pestilence, fire, of flood; and in order to demonstrate the intensity of the Divine wrath, it was distinctly pre-intimated that, having been created for man's sake, they would share in his sweeping punishment at this time."<sup>189</sup> Others have posited that the animals themselves deserved the divine punishment, that in imitation of Man the lower animals grew violent and exchanged their vegetarian nature for that of carnivores.<sup>190</sup> But there is no support for this in the text, and it assigns a degree of rationality and moral responsibility to the animal world that is beyond what we are told in Scripture or have experienced in Zoology. It seems best to see in this universal condemnation the central role and responsibility of Man, and the massive impact his actions have upon the whole of Creation.

***But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.*** (6:8)

This is not a coincidence; a happy circumstance whereby God will not have to totally eradicate the human race. No, this is the manner by which Scripture consistently reveals the underlying purpose of God. The Seed of Woman had not yet come, and the promise of God was not a lie (see above on the divine 'repentance'); it would come to pass. Thus even going into the narrative the believing mind anticipates the solution: the individual graciously selected by God to carry on the path of redemptive history. And it was a gracious choice, for we remember from the beginning of this *toledoth* that the lineage of Seth – including both Enoch and Noah – were born *in the image of Adam*, the fallen and corrupt image of God they each inherited from their sire.

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<sup>189</sup> Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown; 90.

<sup>190</sup> *Cp.* Kass; 162.

Verse 8 closes the second *toledoth* of Genesis, the *toledoth of Adam* (5:1), and introduces the third, the *toledoth of Noah* beginning in verse 9. Here are two 'heads' of the human race: the original, created from the dust of the ground, and the remnant, born through the floods of divine wrath. Obviously the situation is different between the two: Noah is not starting a new race, but merely continuing the same one. Therefore there will not be a creation of a new 'helpmeet' suitable for Noah; his wife will be with him on the ark. And so will his three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, in whom the genealogical paths of the human race will restart. These three men will occupy the fourth *toledoth*, beginning in Genesis 10:1, and finally the one through whom the Promised Seed would come - Shem - will be the focus of the fifth, beginning in Genesis 11:10.

**Week 9: The Crisis of Iniquity****Text Reading: Genesis 6:9 - 22**

*"The wickedness of man had risen to a fearful height of enormity  
...and was fast hastening to the crisis of iniquity."  
(Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown)*

The story of Noah's Flood is so commonplace within Christendom that it has all but lost its ability to awe, even among professing believers. This should not surprise anyone, considering the banal manner in which the narrative is now presented to younger generations of the evangelical world. The VBS advertisement at right is typical of the cute and happy imagery in which the story is now couched, with little indication of the divine pronouncement, *"I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land..."* Apparently we are

**VBS Material**

too concerned that the children of the church will be scared off by a God who would destroy the entire world by a flood – a God of wrath and indignation – so the focus remains entirely upon the preservation of Noah's family and, of course, the cute animals. This is how the biblical narrative is presented to children; to adults it is basically not presented at all. Except, of course, in the apologetical function of 'proving' through geology that the Flood actually did occur, or through maritime engineering, that such a vessel as the ark could have been built, could have floated, and could have held a large number of animals.

But we cannot think that either of these functions – the cute, uplifting Vacation Bible School story or the geotechnical analysis of earth strata – were intended by either Moses or the Holy Spirit in recording the events of the Deluge in Genesis chapters 6 through 9. A large segment of professing Christianity simply does not want to deal with the holy wrath of God, whereas another large segment – and that of evangelicals – only want to prove a scientific point from

the narrative. How often are Peter's words meditated upon with respect to the history of the Flood?

*For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water. Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you – not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience – through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.* (I Peter 3:18-22)

Peter corresponds the Deluge to baptism, a correlation that has befuddled commentators for two thousand years! Several common features, however, arise through even a cursory review of evangelical *and* Catholic commentaries on this passage in I Peter. And the more easily recognizable features of Peter's comment are undoubtedly the best guide to our understanding and appreciation of the original story here in Genesis. For instance, the correlation between the Flood and baptism, tied as is it in Peter's mind with the resurrection of Jesus Christ – must connect with the concept of baptism as a passing from death into life, even as Paul sees it in Romans 6.

*What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection...* (Romans 6:1-5)

Thus we are justified, even obligated, to view the Flood as a baptism of sorts, and by so doing, to actually learn a bit more about baptism than we would by simply limiting our study of that rite to the New Testament. This avenue of study is more properly pursued within a biblical theological study of the 'means

of grace,' but the recognition of the connection that Peter makes should help to orient our own minds as we read and study the biblical narrative of the Flood itself.

Another important connection is with Noah himself, whom Peter refers to as a "*preacher of righteousness.*"<sup>191</sup> It is widely held today, and that a direct product of the prevalent Arminian view of evangelism, that the attainable goal of all Gospel preaching is the salvation of sinners. While there is a great deal of truth in this – insofar as the purpose of God in saving men is to be attained through the preaching of the Gospel – it is often overworked to the point of error. A proper reading of Peter, as he comments in both of his epistles upon the events of the Flood, will show that the divine intention of preaching is not *always* the salvation of sinners. It becomes apparent that the preaching of righteousness as it is only in Jesus Christ, serves to *condemn* as often as it serves to *save*.

*For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly...* (II Peter 2:4-5)

This is a very important concept that has largely been lost in modern evangelism: the *effectiveness* of the preacher is not to be measured by the 'number' of converts, though it is always his desire that this be the manner in which God chooses to glorify Himself through the preaching of the Gospel. He who is faithful to the truth in his day, as Noah was in his own, is a faithful steward of the Gospel, though God may intend for that preaching to condemn a generation rather than to save it. This thought leads to the third implication of the Flood narrative as read through the lens of the Apostle Peter (and, in this case, through those of Jude as well): eschatology.

One rarely sees the Flood narrative in a book or essay on Christian Eschatology, but according to both Peter and Jude, the Deluge is as much a part

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<sup>191</sup> II Peter 2:5

of biblical eschatological teaching as is the Olivet Discourse or the Book of Revelation. We are reminded from our analysis of Enoch's life that Jude's recollection of this patriarch's prophetic ministry was quite similar in tone and context with Peter's understanding of Noah's preaching.

*It was also about these men that Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him."* (Jude 14-15)

Modern eschatological conferences focus on the 'coming of the Lord' as the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. They often fail to see that, while the Lord is indeed coming again in that sense, He has also come many times before. Such events are frequently related in the Bible in the apocalyptic terminology that is now almost entirely relegated to *future* judgment and wrath. But it seems quite clear that Enoch was not prophesying about the Second Coming of the Lord; he was not even prophesying about the First Advent. His prophetic word and warning – as well as the righteousness preaching of Noah – was in reference to the 'coming of the Lord' in the Flood. The Deluge was an eschatological marker: a historical event that serves as a harbinger for another, greater, and correlative event. This is made clear again by Peter,

*Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.* (II Peter 3:3-7)

The point of this introduction is to show how the narrative of the Noaic Flood had *present* application in the teaching and preaching of both Peter and

Jude, that we may realize that it *still* has application to our own day. Whether plumbing the depths of the meaning of Christian baptism, understanding the divine purpose of the preaching of the Gospel in judgment, or recognizing the streams of eschatological thought running through the Bible, the Flood of Noah's day is of as great a significance as the Exodus in Moses' day. These events were historical, but they were also *redemptive*-historical. Therefore they can never be relegated to mere storytelling, but must always be viewed from a solidly and consistently redemptive-historical perspective.

*These are the records of the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God. Noah became the father of three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.* (6:9-10)

Literally the opening words of verse 9 read, "*these are the generations of Noah...*" This is the third '*toledoth*' of Genesis, the third major section (of ten) of the narrative of this first book of the Pentateuch. Marten Woudstra provides an excellent summary of the ten *toledoth* in Genesis in his essay "The Toledoth of the Book of Genesis and their Redemptive-Historical Significance."<sup>192</sup> Woudstra shows that while the root of the word means 'to bear,' as in 'to generate,' the particular form of the word found ten times in Genesis "refers to the product of bearing; hence it stands for that which was produced, for the result."<sup>193</sup> But it is clear from the usage in Genesis that *toledoth* means more than mere genealogy - it is often used without a significant genealogy following - and Woudstra continues,

In the word *toledoth*, therefore, we find the meaning: this is what came of it. And in the genitive ('these are the *toledoth* of...') we have the thought: this is where is started from. The word *toledoth* indicates the end of a line; the added genitive marks a new starting point.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Woudstra, Marten H. *Calvin Theological Journal* 5 (1970) pp. 184-89.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*; 187.

<sup>194</sup> *Idem.*

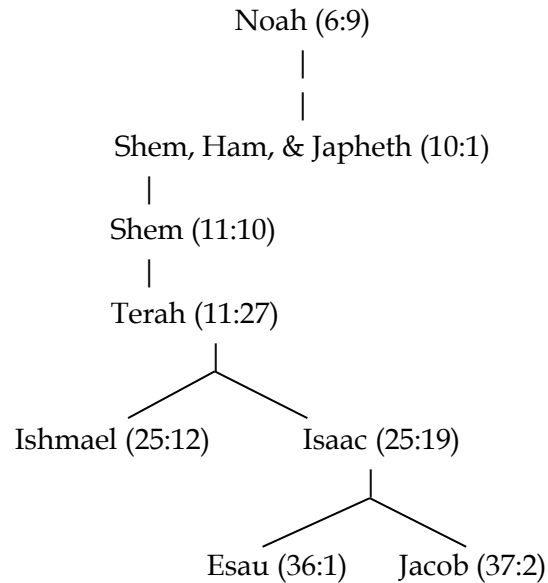
The point of this term, then, is to introduce a section of redemptive history that focuses on the particular influence or divine instrumentality of one of the men in the lineage of the promised Seed. It is not always obvious why a particular man is chosen for a *toledoth*: we can readily understand the *toledoth* of Noah and of Shem, but it is not clearly apparent why there is a *toledoth* of Terah, the father of Abram, while there is no *toledoth* of Abram/ Abraham. It is also not immediately apparent from the *toledoth* statement exactly who will be the 'hero' of the subsequent narrative. In this particular segment, Noah is the main character, but the focus of the Isaac *toledoth* (Gen. 25:19) is Jacob, and that of Jacob's *toledoth* (Gen. 27:2) is Joseph. Therefore we must be careful not to press the *toledoth* too strongly on what follows, but rather to see each *toledoth* as a broad 'inclusio' of material built around a particular historical aspect of the unveiling of God's redemptive plan in its earliest stages.

Woudstra's analysis further our understanding of the use Moses makes of the *toledoth* headings to "show where the ways begin to part."<sup>195</sup> This is an important feature of the book of Genesis: to show the development of humanity not in biographical sketches - which is too often how the stories of Genesis are read - but rather as diverging streams of the human race, with an associated narrowing of the 'Seed' line breaking off from the main branches of the race. When the line breaks in two - one 'covenantal' and the other genealogical but not 'covenantal' - the *toledoth* often describes both lines at least briefly. Thus there is a convergence at Noah (6:9) but a divergence with Noah's three sons (10:1), followed by a narrowing at Shem (11:10). Later in Genesis there is a convergence in Terah (11:27), with a divergence in Ishmael (25:12) and Isaac (25:19), and later with Esau (36:1) and Jacob (37:2). The pattern develops somewhat as follows:

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<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*; 188.





Genesis 6:9 recapitulates Noah's character as a believer, and his progeny, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. The description of Noah as "*a righteous man, blameless in his time*" cannot properly be taken in an absolute sense without contravening the underlying doctrine of total depravity and the transmission of Adamic sin through the human race, found throughout the Bible. We remember the formula provided at the beginning of the lineage of Seth, that Adam's son was begotten *in the image* of Adam his father and no longer directly in the image of God. Thus we understand the 'righteousness' and 'blameless' character of Noah to be (1) in comparison with the rest of mankind '*in his time,*' and (2) the gracious description of a man solid in faith. Noah's faith was '*credited to him as righteousness*' in the same manner as Abraham's, and as every believer throughout time.

*By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.* (Hebrews 11:7)

Once again we are reminded of the faithfulness of God to His own word and promise. He who promised the Seed of Woman – clearly in that place (3:15) to be the descendant of Eve – would providentially arrange to a "*remnant according to faith*" to withstand the almost universal declension within the human

race – even if that remnant were to be one solitary man – to be preserved through the crisis of iniquity.

*Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence. God looked on the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth.* (6:11-12)

There is an intriguing phrase which begins with this verse and continues multiple times through the Flood narrative: *all flesh*. Our theology teaches us that only man among terrestrial beings is *morally responsible* and, consequently, capable of sin and wickedness.<sup>196</sup> But the phrase *all flesh* in this narrative clearly has the implication of man *and* animal, not just man. Though there is simply not enough Scripture to develop the thought to any conclusive or even satisfactory result, the indication in this verse and elsewhere is that there is some level of culpability within the animal kingdom. This is perhaps the biblical allusion that C. S. Lewis develops in his *Chronicles of Narnia* series, wherein animals fall out along the same moral divide as do men.

Whatever the moral culpability of the animal world may be – and there is little doubt that this is an issue indeterminate to man – it is clear from the biblical record that the animal world shares with mankind the punishment for sin. The phrase *all flesh* here in Genesis 6 is indicative of just how horrible everything had gotten since the original sin of Adam, progressing “like an avalanche”<sup>197</sup> it was to engulf the entirety of the created world. “Both people and animals have transgressed the parameters of their order and the hierarchy ordained by God...This is a picture of the total rupture of created relationships on the part of the creation.”<sup>198</sup>

This language foreshadows later prophecies concerning ‘the New Heaven and the New Earth’ in which all relationships within that realm known as ‘flesh’ will be harmonious: the lion will dwell with the lamb, and the child will play at

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<sup>196</sup> Cp. Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown; 91.

<sup>197</sup> Von Rad; 117.

<sup>198</sup> Waltke; 134.

the adder's nest. It was well within the power of God to eradicate the entire human race, save Noah and his family, while at the same time preserving the animals. This He chose not to do; a sign that the immorality of man was somehow mirrored in the animal world, as both would partake of the divine wrath to come. This is Creation intertwined in ways inexplicable by science and mysterious to moral philosophy.

*Then God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence because of them; and behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth."  
(6:13)*

It is evident from the sequel that this passage constitutes a divine monologue and revelation to Noah, but as such it becomes impossible to place within the overall chronology of events. For instance, if this is the word given by the Lord at the 'commencement' of the one hundred and twenty years "*in which the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah,*" then the revelation came before the birth of Noah's three sons. Yet they are mentioned in the very next section concerning the construction of the ark in which Noah - and his wife, and his three sons, and their wives with them - would be saved from the wrath to come. Many commentators view this as further indication of Noah's faith: that he believed God would preserve and continue the race even though he himself was childless.

There is another explanation of the text, however, that does not attempt to fit the words into a rigid linear chronology. It is often the case within biblical revelation that divine announcements and instructions are conflated - large gaps in time are reduced to consecutive sentences in a paragraph (and not always consecutive in a chronological manner). It is quite possible that the diagnosis of mankind, as well as the subsequent command to build the ark in which Noah and his sons would be preserved, is merely a summary of the on-going revelation from God to Noah throughout the interim between the first indication of the divine intention, to the day in which Noah entered the ark.

Again, the point of the narrative is not to set out a clear and definitive timeline of events, though that is very much what the Western mind seeks when



reading such stories. The purpose, however, is to clearly deliver a record of the incredible depravity of mankind by the tenth generation from the first man. “In short, it was a period of violence, of might against right, of rapine, lust, and universal unbelief in the promise. With the virtual extinction of the Sethite faith and worship no further hope remained, and that generation required to be wholly swept away in judgment.”<sup>199</sup>

This phenomenon is typical of another minor theme that runs through the pages of Scripture: that of the ‘full measure’ of a people’s guilt prior to the outpouring of divine retribution. The inheritance of the promised land by Abraham’s descendants was to be delayed some four hundred years because, *‘the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.’*<sup>200</sup> And the martyrdoms of all of the righteous men under the Old Covenant were to be exacted at the hands of the generation that witnessed and rejected Jesus Christ, who told his contemporaries, *‘fill up, then, the measure of your fathers’ guilt.’*<sup>201</sup> The imagery, therefore, is of a vessel or scale, the highest graduation of which constitutes the ‘full measure’ of a people’s sin and guilt. Rejecting the long-suffering of God, and spurning the proclamation of His grace through the prophecies of Enoch and the preaching of Noah – as well as through the preaching of the Gospel today – mankind continues to add to the vessel, filling up the full measure of guilt, until the day when the allotment is reached and divine wrath is poured forth. We are not told how it is that God sets the times for every nation on the face of the earth, but surely this ‘filling up’ of guilt must be a major parameter in the divine determination of any and every people’s stay upon this earth.

<sup>199</sup> Edersheim, Alfred *Bible History: Old Testament* (Peabody, MA; Hendrickson Publishers; 1995); 27.

<sup>200</sup> Genesis 15:16

<sup>201</sup> Matthew 23:32

*Make for yourself an ark of gopher wood; you shall make the ark with rooms, and shall cover it inside and out with pitch. This is how you shall make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its breadth fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. You shall make a window for the ark, and finish it to a cubit from the top; and set the door of the ark in the side of it; you shall make it with lower, second, and third decks.* (6:14-16)

The word 'ark' is of somewhat indeterminate origin, "a word so archaic that scholars neither know its derivation, nor even to what language it belongs."<sup>202</sup> It has been the earnest attempt of innumerable commentators and apologists to derive the size and shape of the ark, and consequently to prove that it was capable of housing a vast number of animals. Others have attempted to prove the vessel's seaworthiness, though most scholars agree that "the ark was a ship, destined not to sail, but only to float - an oblong, flat-bottomed chest."<sup>203</sup> Perhaps the classic elucidation and illumination of this passage, among 'modern' commentators at least, is the following excerpt from Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown. Read it...if you can.

The rule given by Laplace for determining the stability of equilibrium of a floating body is, That the equilibrium will be stable in every direction, when the sum of the products of each element of the section of the floating body, at the level of the fluid, into the square of its distance from that horizontal axis, through the centre of gravity of the section, in relation to which the sum of the products is a minimum, - is greater than the product of the volume of the displaced fluid, into the height of the centre of gravity of the floating body, above the center of gravity of the volume.<sup>204</sup>

The commentators go on to discuss the ratios of the cubit measurements given in Genesis 6:15, and concludes, "Thus the 'fashion' or form of the ark was completely adapted for its purpose."<sup>205</sup> This section of the otherwise scholarly and helpful commentary leaves an average person glassy-eyed, and appears to have been contributed by a nautical engineer, to be read by nautical engineers. It

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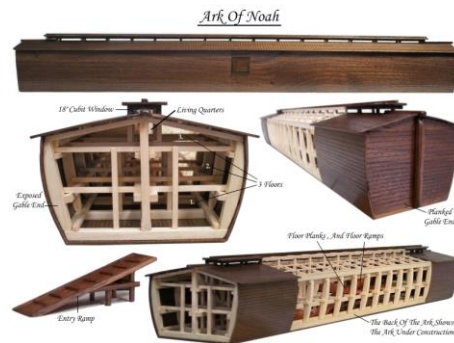
<sup>202</sup> Ellicott, Charles John *Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible Volume 1*; (Grand Rapids: Zondervan; 1954); 37

<sup>203</sup> Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown; 92.

<sup>204</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*; 93.

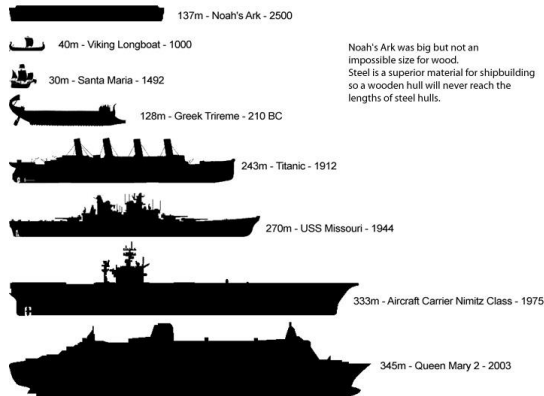
is hard to believe that either Noah or Moses were of that occupation: Noah built the ark as he was instructed by God, and Moses recorded the dimensions in the simplest possible manner. All attempts to reconstruct the ark, either in diagrammatic or actual form (and many, many such attempts have been made) run into far more difficulty than the corresponding attempts to reconstruct either the tabernacle of the wilderness or the Temple in Jerusalem. We are simply not given enough data to work with, for it was never the intent of either Moses or the Holy Spirit that we should fix our attention in that direction.



One of Innumerable Renderings of Noah's Ark

The data given consists of the length, width, and height of the ark at 300 cubits, 50 cubits, and 30 cubits respectively. By any of the standard estimates for

Noahs Ark Length Comparison:



a cubit, ranging from eighteen to twenty-one inches generally, this is a large vessel. Between 450 and 525 feet in length, 75 to 87-1/2 feet in breadth, and 45 to 52-1/2 feet high, it would have dwarfed any ocean-going vessel made by man for almost 5,000 years from its building. Ships built in the Age of Steel,

of course, are far larger than the ark, and this has led many critics to claim that the dimensions of the ark were impossible with wood construction. Such claims, however, are based on the erroneous assumption that the ark was meant to sail, whereas it was only intended that it should float. It was a very large chest, coated and waterproofed – at least for a time – with asphaltic pitch inside and out, and designed along the simplest lines for the purpose of floating a remnant of man and beast through the Deluge.

In all of the technical debates and designs that have gone into either proving Noah's ark to be a myth, or proving it to be quite reasonable, it is often overlooked that this entire event was orchestrated by the Lord God, and therefore the element of miracle ought not be dismissed. "What is important, I think, is that one should not attempt to find a scientific explanation of every incident or factor in the Flood story, if by 'scientific' is meant 'accountable by known law.'"<sup>206</sup>

*Behold, I, even I am bringing the flood of water upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life, from under heaven; everything that is on the earth shall perish. But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall enter the ark – you and your sons and your wife, and your sons' wives with you. (6:17-18)*

The language of destruction here is reminiscent of the language of creation in Genesis chapters 1 and 2. The 'breath of life' will be removed from 'all flesh under heaven.' Excepted, of course, are the creatures of the sea. This is the first place in which God has indicated just what form of destruction He intends to bring upon the earth – a flood of waters – and also the first mention we have in the Book of Genesis of the word *covenant*. Reformed theologians especially infer a covenant with Adam – the Adamic Covenant – on the basis of the narrative of the garden, and on a tenuous rendering of Hosea 6:7, where the word translated 'Adam' in many English Bibles could just as well be translated 'Man.' Be that as it may, it is with Noah that we find the first explicit covenant utilizing the term *b'rith*. As with most of the covenants we read of in Scripture, this one with Noah is *monergistic* – it is God who is making the covenant with Noah. Indeed, the literally rendering of the phrase in verse 18 is "and I set up a covenant of Me with you..."

The mention of the *b'rith* here with Noah signifies further development in the flow of redemptive history and marks a 'new' relationship between God and Man. It is for this reason – that is, the lack of a covenant explicitly mentioned in

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<sup>206</sup> Culance; *The Flood: Local or Global*; 26.

relation to Adam or Seth, or even Enoch – that we may conclude that ‘common grace’ was held in abeyance during the centuries from the Fall to the Flood. Certainly the elucidation of the Noaic Covenant in Genesis 9 speaks of a greater intervention and control on the part of God over Man.

There had been no covenant with Adam or with the Sethites, but in the higher state of things which began with Noah, man was to hold a more exactly defined relation to God; and though they had begun to attach the notion of Deity to the name Jehovah in the days of Enos, yet it was not till the time of Moses that it became the distinct title of God in covenant with man.<sup>207</sup>

Appropriate to that level in redemptive history that we have attained in Noah, this covenant is not salvific or redemptive in the sense of the later Abrahamic covenant, and certainly not as comprehensive in its redemptive work as the New Covenant in Jesus Christ. The covenant with Noah is made by *elohim* – ‘God,’ and not *Jehovah* – the LORD, due to the fact, most likely, that it was not a covenant of the Kingdom of God *per se*, but rather one with the whole of Creation, the ‘kingdom of Earth.’ Yet the significance of the mention of the *b’rith* here, prior to the Flood, should not be minimized by these comments. For just as Peter associates the ark with salvation, and the Flood with baptism, so we may see in the Noaic Covenant a distinct foreshadowing of all subsequent covenants in the direct line of the Promised Seed, which would include the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants, and the prophesied New Covenant.

Thus Noah becomes a typical human being: looking back, he is in a sense a ‘second’ Adam through whom the human race will be preserved and ‘restarted.’ Looking forward, he is a type of Christ, in whom is ultimate salvation and deliverance from the wrath of God to come. This forward focus tends to be a consistent feature in the covenants of the Bible – in some manner they partake of a portion of the full and final redemptive work of God in Christ,

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<sup>207</sup> Ellicott; 38.



and are therefore to be seen as stages of growth in the development of redemption.

*And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. Of the birds after their kind, and of the animals after their kind, of every creeping thing of the ground after its kind, two of every kind will come to you to keep them alive. As for you, take for yourself some of all food which is edible, and gather it to yourself; and it shall be for food for you and for them.* (6:19-21)

There is a bit of controversy between what is said here in the closing verses of Chapter 6 and that which we read in the opening verses of Chapter 7. Here the animals are to be taken into the ark by twos, in Chapter 7 they are paired off differently – with a seven involved (either seven pairs, or three pairs plus one) of ‘clean’ animals, and only two of ‘unclean’ animals. The correspondence of the two passages is not terribly difficult, but it would best be analyzed as part of the latter section in Chapter 7, along with a general discussion on the types of animals, and how it was that they came to the ark. The gist of this passage is quite clear, however, that the purpose of the ark is for the preservation of a remnant of Creation alive through the Flood.

Once again the language reminds the reader of Genesis 1, with the phrase “*after its kind*” repeated just as it was in that earlier narrative of Creation. For the Flood is, in a manner of speaking, a re-Creation. We have already seen that the unchanging faithfulness of God to His word and to His promise negates completely the possibility of ‘starting over’ with a new Adam formed from the dust of the earth. Noah is a ‘second’ Adam,<sup>208</sup> and the animals preserved along with him in the ark are the progenitors of a new race of each species. This typology speaks volumes to the prophetic message, again, concerning the New Heaven and the New Earth, for there will be animals in the New Earth, not just men. Maybe C. S. Lewis is not so wide of the mark in his *Narnia* books.

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<sup>208</sup> This may sound a bit jarring to the ears, but it should be noted that the New Testament nowhere refers to Jesus Christ as the ‘second’ Adam, but rather as the ‘last’ Adam (*cp.* I Cor. 15:45).

*Thus Noah did; according to all that God had commanded him, so he did.* (6:22)

Though James used the example of Abraham, he might just as well have used that of Noah: *"But someone may well say, 'You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.'"* For faith without works is, and always has been, dead. Noah was a man of faith, by the gracious working of God in him, and his faith *worked*.

Here again there is a great deal of scholarly criticism about whether the ark could have been built by one man (we remember that for at least the first several decades of the endeavor, Noah had either no sons or only young ones). Some commentators have surmised that Noah 'subbed out' the work to local carpenters and artisans, but there is no indication of this and it would seem somewhat incongruous to the idiosyncratic nature of what Noah was doing, and what it *meant* for his neighbors, for them to assist. What was predicted by Noah had apparently never been experienced – certainly not in such a cataclysmic manner, and probably not at all (*cp.* Genesis 2:5-6). God gave Noah roughly one hundred and twenty years to complete his task, and it is by no means unreasonable – given the remarkable things men have always managed to built in their backyards or garages – that Noah accomplished what he set out to do within that time. What is so strikingly evident of Noah's faith is that he *did what God told him to do*, in spite of all opposition and delay, he persevered in faith, as the writer of Hebrews tells us,

*By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.*

**Week 10: The Great Flood – Part I****Text Reading: Genesis 7:1 - 24**

*“It is improbable that without such a catastrophe a tale should arise of such extensive influence upon human thought.”*  
(John D. Davis)

Werner Keller, in his well-known book *The Bible as History*, devotes a lengthy segment of the discussion of the archaeology of the Flood to the discoveries in the mid 1920s, of the British archaeologist Leonard Wooley.



draws all of his attention to the discovery by Wooley’s team of a subterranean layer of silt and sand which divides the strata between two sections evidencing human civilization. Wooley’s own conclusion from this discovery is that he had located ‘the Flood.’ This news created a sensation – headlines in newspapers in Great Britain and the United States – when it was made public in 1929. Wooley set out to determine the ‘extent’ of the Deluge by sinking additional shafts here and there throughout the region of Mesopotamia where his teams were working, and concluded definitively that the Great Flood was not universal, but regional. “According to Wooley the disaster engulfed an area northwest of the Persian Gulf 400 miles long and 100 miles wide.”<sup>209</sup> In other words, the ‘Great Flood’ of Noah was no more significant than an unusual flooding of the Nile or of the Mississippi. But is such a conclusion reasonable in light of



Fig. 5. The extent of the Flood in Mesopotamia.

<sup>209</sup> Keller; 31-32.

the literary data from the ancient world? And could such a limited flood serve the purpose for which God intended it?

The belief that the Flood in Noah's day was of limited extent has gained in popularity over the past two hundred years, as Geology came into existence as a science. It is widely considered to be unreasonable and irrational to consider that a flood could cover the entire earth, including mountains as high as those found in the Himalayan range. Some scientists have surmised that such an inundation would have severely and fatally altered the magnetic field of the earth, irrevocably upsetting the earth's orbit and rotation. Of course, such an alteration in the orbital and rotational physics of the planet might also help explain the 'natural' cause of the reduction in human longevity - but there is no way of proving such a thesis in either direction. Suffice it to say that the 'limited extent' view of the Flood has gained adherents among those who still believe the Great Deluge to be a historical event.

Among the advocates of such a view is Arthur Custance, certainly no stranger to unorthodox opinions within the broader parameters of evangelical orthodoxy. Custance points out that the 'evidence' of a worldwide flood, both from the biblical record and from ancient legends and traditions, can be explained in a manner that does not necessitate more than a regional flood. First, the concept of the 'whole earth' in the Bible is frequently used as hyperbole, and Custance gives numerous examples of such phraseology where the context clearly indicates a more limited application of what is being said. Custance goes on to explain that the universality of flood stories among all ancient peoples of the world also does not necessitate a worldwide flood, for all of the peoples of the world descended from Noah and would have taken their stories - and modified them in transit - with them in their post-flood migrations.

Both of these comments are valid - 'universal' language is often used in the Bible as hyperbole, and the universality of the flood narratives in ancient literature and tradition most certainly derived from the common history

bequeathed to all peoples descended from Noah. Yet these remain simply plausible arguments for a limited Flood; they hardly constitute proof of such limitation. For this Custance leans on a bit of a reed: God's economy. Custance points out, again accurately, that the Flood need only be great enough in extent to thoroughly wipe out all of mankind, all of the land animals, and all of the birds – save those who were on the ark. This was the purpose of the Flood, and securing that purpose *could* be considered the criterion for determining the extent of the Flood. But, of course, we have no way of knowing just how dispersed man and beast were upon the earth prior to the Flood, so we once again cannot argue from a minimum requirement of destruction to a limited regional extent. Thus Custance's logic becomes evident as pure conjecture, "However...this king of catastrophic event [i.e., a *worldwide* flood] seems to be so far beyond what was required for the judgment of mankind that it is unlikely god would see fit to bring it about. For where miracle is concerned, God is an economist."<sup>210</sup> There is little that is either scientific or exegetical in this statement.

The difficulty many 'moderns' have with the idea of a global flood is the requisite depth of the waters needed to cover the tallest mountain ranges on earth. The passages in Genesis describing the extent and depth of the Deluge do seem to indicate the submergence of *all* landforms, including mountain ranges we now know to be of incredible height from sea level.

*The water prevailed and increased greatly upon the earth, and the ark floated on the surface of the water. The water prevailed more and more upon the earth, so that all the high mountains everywhere under the heavens were covered.*

(Genesis 7:18-19)

The language of Genesis 7 is noticeably reminiscent of Genesis 1, the language of Creation, and the phrase "*under the heavens*" does not seem to permit regional limitation, certainly not to a 100-mile wide swath of territory flanking the Euphrates River. Instead of seeking to justify flood parameters that satisfy

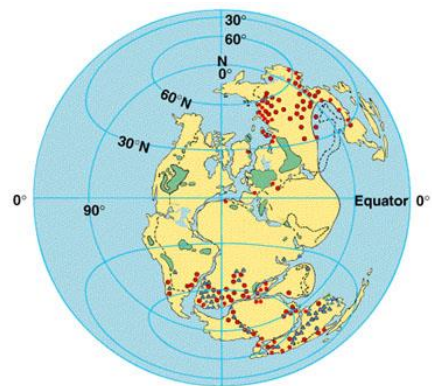
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<sup>210</sup> Custance; *The Flood: Local or Global?*; 25-26.

modern scientific criticism, it should be the biblical exegetes goal to satisfy the language of the Scriptures, unless that proves to be impossible (and the language of the Scriptures shown to be hyperbolic or metaphorical). With regard to the Flood, the narrative is clearly not metaphorical, and the economy of words used also argues strongly against hyperbole. Perhaps there is another solution that melds solid biblical scholarship with at least some of the teachings of modern Geology.

The tacit assumption made by the 'limited extent' camp is that the physical condition of the world in Noah's day was much the same as it is today. This is true also of the more conservative 'universal flood' camp, who frequently discuss the tallest peaks of the mountains of Ararat (where the ark apparently came to rest) in terms of the most recent determined elevations. But what if the physical earth was *not* the same prior to the Flood as afterward? And do we have any *biblical* reason to think that an alteration occurred not only among the inhabitants of the earth, but also with the physical appearance of the earth as well? Actually, there is at least one biblical allusion to an occurrence involving the earth (depending on how one interprets the passage) that also fits hand-in-glove with a commonly accepted geological principle: *Pangea*

It does not take a degreed geologist to see that the current continents of the globe are shaped very much like the pieces of a gigantic jigsaw puzzle, and several generations of geologists have agreed that at one time all of the continents were one large supercontinent called **Pangea** (well, we don't know what it was called then...but that is what geologists call it now). Evolutionary geologists, of course, date the separation of this mega-continent to two hundred million years in the past, but there is at least one passage in the Bible that indicates it might not have been all that long ago – in fact, it might even have occurred *after* the Flood.



*Arpachshad became the father of Shelah; and Shelah became the father of Eber. Two sons were born to Eber; the name of the one was Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided; and his brother's name was Joktan.* (Genesis 10:24-25)

This 'dividing' of the earth is frequently interpreted as referring to the separation of the nations at the Tower of Babel,<sup>211</sup> but the term used does not necessitate such a conclusion. Philologists point out that the word literally means to 'cleave' and is frequently used of harrowing the earth or the cutting of canals in the earth. It is a physical, not a political term.<sup>212</sup> Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown report that, "Others are of the opinion that extensive landslips occurred – the sea bursting through many parts of the solid land and forming straits and gulfs, or separating continents, and that it was to such breaches 'the dividing of the earth' refers."<sup>213</sup>

It is, of course, possible that the phrase with reference to Peleg does simply mean that it was during his lifetime that the nations were separated by the confusion of their languages. But one must also consider that this event occurred in the lifetimes of most, if not all, of the descendants listed in Genesis 10. Furthermore, that division did not take place in the biblical record until the next chapter, so it does seem a bit odd that the author singles out Peleg and attributes the significance of his name to the events of the next chapter. Still, it is possible. But what we do know – or at least what geological science teaches us – is that there was once a contiguous continent in which all of the present continents were adhered. This continent broke apart – geologists say gradually, but there is no evidence in support of that claim as there is none to deny it. It may have been sudden and remarkable – which would go far in explaining why someone might be named Peleg in remembrance of the event.

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<sup>211</sup> Keil & Delitzsch; 171.

<sup>212</sup> *Cp.* Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown; 118.

<sup>213</sup> *Idem.*

And if the separation of the continents came after the Flood, there is no reason to doubt that the consequent tectonic activity gave rise – literally – to the highest mountain ranges we now know. In other words, it is not unreasonable to surmise that the mountains of Noah’s day were not quite so tall as they have become. Apparently such ranges as the Hindu Kush and the Himalayas are still growing, as the Indian subcontinent continues to crash into the larger Eurasian landmass. If God began the separation of these masses – with some broken off and others colliding – we must believe that it occurred post-Creation. There is no reason not to believe that it also occurred post-Flood. Thus the landmass inundated by the Deluge would have been one, not seven, and the mountains that were covered may have been thousands of feet tall, but need not have been tens of thousands of feet tall. It is conjecture, to be sure, but such as attempts to let the language of Scripture retain its natural sense – which is always the first goal of sound hermeneutics – while at the same time bringing to bear whatever mankind has learned of this planet from Geology.

*Then the LORD said to Noah, “Enter the ark, you and all your household, for you alone I have seen to be righteous before Me in this time.”* (7:1)

Whenever the Bible declares a man to be ‘righteous,’ theologians debate what that means. Was this, as all Reformed commentators are quick to point out, the ‘*righteousness that is of faith*’? Or did Noah ‘earn’ this accolade through obedience and faith ‘on his own’? So fervently do Reformed scholars insist that Noah’s righteousness was a gift of divine grace, the fact that Noah did indeed live a life noticeably different from everyone around him seems to be obscured. On the other side, however, the view that holds that Noah’s righteousness somehow proves an alternative means of salvation during that era does grave injustice to the grace of God, which is alone sufficient for redemption. It may be that we are packing too much into the word ‘righteous,’ and therefore expecting too much out of it.



Gerhard von Rad points out that the Hebrew word *tsaddiq* at its most basic level, signifies one who “does justice to a relationship in which he stands.”<sup>214</sup> In other words, when a man abides properly within any relationship, he is considered ‘righteous’ with respect to that relationship. “If man stands in right relation to God, i.e., believes, trusts God, then he is ‘righteous.’”<sup>215</sup> Thus when David protests his ‘righteousness’ in the Psalms with regard to King Saul, all he is stating is that within the relationship he had with Saul, he was upright and without blame. To be ‘righteous’ does not necessarily imply sinlessness, only blamelessness within the proper parameters of the given relationship.

Thus Noah was righteous in the midst of his generation, meaning that he alone continued to believe and hope in the divine promise of the Seed. But there can be no doubt that this inner faith was manifested in outer behavior that set Noah apart from his fellow man – much as the Sethites must have stood apart from the Cainites throughout the antediluvian generations. Enoch stood in the same relation to God in the generation of Lamech the Cainite. But by the time the “*longsuffering of God*” had expired only Noah retained the integrity of his profession, only he “*held fast the confession of his hope without wavering.*”<sup>216</sup>

Genesis chapter 7 brings us to the year of the Flood, and the comment with regard to Noah’s righteousness generally brings up an unanswerable question concerning Noah’s grandfather, Methuselah. The timeline of the antediluvian patriarchs leaves only Noah and Methuselah alive in the year of the Flood, with Methuselah’s lifespan ending providentially that very same year. The question arises, of course, as to whether Methuselah died *before* or *in* the Flood. If we make the assumption that the lineage of Seth had thus far maintained the ‘good confession,’ then we may conclude from God’s words to Noah that Methuselah died ‘of natural causes’ in the year that also brought the Deluge upon the earth. The only other two options are that Methuselah

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<sup>214</sup> Von Rad; 120.

<sup>215</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>216</sup> Hebrews 10:23

apostatized and was no longer walking in faith, or that Methuselah, though still holding fast his integrity, perished in the Flood along with the wicked generation. The first of these options has no biblical warrant, and the second seems to defy the Lord's words with regard to Noah being "*alone righteous*" in this generation. While it is true that manifestations of divine wrath often encompass the faithful along with the wicked, there seems to be no reason to single out Noah as 'alone righteous' if Methuselah were also still alive. A simpler, and more comforting, conclusion is that the death of Methuselah marked the end of the patience of Jehovah; the time had come for the wrath of God to be revealed upon all flesh.

*You shall take with you of every clean animal by sevens, a male and his female; and of the animals that are not clean two, a male and his female; also of the birds of the sky, by sevens, male and female, to keep offspring alive on the face of all the earth.*

(7:2-3)

There is a humorous scene in the movie *The King and I* in which the king – Yul Brynner – announces his plans to send seven male elephants to the American President Lincoln to assist him in prosecuting the war there. When Anna tries to explain that sending only *male* elephants might prove problematic to the king's intended plans, his highness simply commands her to 'work out the details' and leaves the room. The Lord had no such difficulty in setting forth the proper pairings for the animals to be taken on the ark: they were to enter 'by twos' (literally, 'two twos'), "*a male and his female.*" This seemingly simple and obvious notation, however, is frequently overlooked when commentators then attempt to decipher the meaning of the 'sevens' here in verse 2. Some – mainly among the liberal 'critical' school – claim that this is a contradiction from Genesis 6:19, where Noah is commanded to bring "*two of every kind*" of animal and bird onto the ark. These scholars again see evidence of multiple authors, dividing this section up between the Yahwist (J) and the Elohist (E) sources.

The answer to this contention is as before: to have a contradiction so close together in the text does not prove that there were multiple authors; rather it proves that whoever brought the material together was incompetent. *If* there had been two sources, and *if* these two sources differed so obviously and in such close proximity, then it stands to reason the redactor – the man or men who wove the multiple sources together into the final ‘book’ of Genesis – would have smoothed out the text and removed the contradiction. But there is a much simpler explanation, and one that hardly requires either multiple source material or incompetent editors.

The commandment to bring in the animals ‘*by twos*’ is associated in both Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 with the designation ‘*male and female.*’ In other words, the *two twos* mean nothing more than that Noah should not make the mistake King Mongkut was making in the sending of elephants to America. “The one passage commands Noah to take of the beasts and fowls by *twos* or pairs, male and female, while the other specified the *number* of pairs to be taken.”<sup>217</sup> Chapter 7 not only reiterates the otherwise obvious requirement that the animals be brought in pairs in order to insure their progeny, but also expands the ordinance to encompass the distinction between *clean* and *unclean* animals. Of the former there were to be *seven* pairs; of the latter only one pair. The reason for this disparity has to do with the purpose of the ‘clean’ animals, which alone were acceptable for sacrifice (and possibly also for eating, though that is not fully established as yet in the narrative), whereas a single pair of the ‘unclean’ animals would be sufficient for propagation.

The mention of the distinction of ‘clean’ and ‘unclean’ here in Genesis 7 does seem somewhat anachronistic – is not that differentiation a product of the Mosaic law and dispensation? Again, liberal scholars assert that this is merely an interpolation by later writers (not Moses, of course!) of the later ritualistic designations upon a much earlier and simpler time. But we have already read

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<sup>217</sup> Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown; 94.

that *sacrifice* was a feature of human life vis-à-vis God; is it too much to conclude that somehow God had made it clear – or man had deduced – that only certain animals were acceptable as such? Other aspects of the Mosaic covenant are to be found in earlier times – such as the Sabbath (Genesis 2), the prohibition on murder (Genesis 9), and even the offering of the tithe (Genesis 14). Rather than originating with Moses on Mt. Sinai, it may be argued that the ordinances of the Law were simply codified by him at that time. “For the distinction between clean and unclean animals did not originate with Moses, but was confirmed by him as a long established custom, in harmony with the law.”<sup>218</sup>

*For after seven more days, I will send rain on the earth forty days and forty nights; and I will blot out from the face of the land every living thing that I have made.” Noah did according to all that the LORD had commanded him. (7:4-5)*

Attempts have been made to correspond the final week prior to the Flood with the week of Creation, and while there must certainly be an allusion here – the *seven days* corresponding with the other examples of Creation terminology in the Flood narrative – there are no direct connection markers to be found. It appears that his ‘week’ was moving week for Noah: it was the time allotted for boarding and stocking the ark for its impending voyage. Jewish tradition apparently held that this seven day period was the time allocated for mourning the death of Methuselah.<sup>219</sup>

God tells Noah that at the end of the seven day period He would inundate the earth with forty days of rain (the ‘*forty nights*’ appears to be an interpolation made by a later copyist due to the seeming need for completion). But the ‘forty days’ is sufficient to establish the first of what would become a common period of humiliation, temptation, or judgment: 40 days or 40 years. Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights (Deut. 9:9); Elijah traveled the same amount of time to Mt. Horeb, fleeing from wicked Jezebel (I Kings 19:8); and, of

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<sup>218</sup> Keil & Delitzsch; 144.

<sup>219</sup> Ellicott; 39.

course, the Lord Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, after having fasted for forty days and forty nights (Matt. 4:2).

How did Noah manage to get all of the animals on the ark in seven days time? Had he begun to collect the menagerie that would join him in salvation from the impending deluge, years before this point? It does not seem to follow from the narrative – sparse as it is in details – that Noah spent any time on animal-gathering expeditions during the 120 year period prior to the Flood. It seems rather left for the reader to once again make the connection with the earlier Creation narrative – seeing Noah as the ‘second Adam’ – and concluding that God placed an intuition with all of the animals (rather, in the requisite number of pairs of each *kind* of animal), to gather to Noah of their own accord. This was much the same as when the animals came before Adam to be named at the beginning.<sup>220</sup> “[T]he animals collected about Noah and were taken into the ark, without his having to exert himself to collect them, and...they did so in consequence of an instinct produced by God.”<sup>221</sup> This intuition must have been divinely ordained for the moment, and could not have been the ‘natural’ instinct that many animals possess of impending natural disaster. For if the latter were the case, the animals would not have come ‘two by two,’ but would have stampeded into the ark in an uncontrolled frenzy. We are intended to witness here the orderly hand of God orchestrating the preservation of man and the animals alive through the Flood, a point confirmed just a few verses later when we are told that it was God who ‘closed Noah in’ the ark.

In conceiving and visualizing this event, one is struck by the undoubted astonishment that must have been on the minds and faces of Noah’s neighbors as they watched the beasts of earth and the birds of the air move in steady procession toward, and then into, the ark. Evangelical commentators frequently assert that this testimony, along with the steady and unyielding preaching of

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<sup>220</sup> Fuller; 33.

<sup>221</sup> Keil & Delitzsch; 145.

Noah over the course of so many long years, must have resulted in the redemption of not a few men who yet perished in the Flood. Theirs was, to be sure, eleventh-hour conversions not unlike the thief on the cross. This has become a standard evangelical interpretation of Peter's enigmatic words,

*For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water.*

(I Peter 3:19-20)

There is, however, no biblical basis for such hope that the preaching of Noah finally bore fruit, even as the rains started coming down once Noah was safely ensconced within the ark. Deathbed conversions are rare, and it is far more the nature of human sin to intensify railing and blasphemy against God as divine judgment pours forth, than to repent and seek forgiveness and salvation. Those who ignored and rejected the preaching of the gospel through Noah, would not likely believe when the things Noah prophesied began to happen. "They that tremble not in hearing shall be crushed to pieces in feeling."<sup>222</sup> Signs and wonders harden the unbeliever in his unbelief, and confirm the righteous judgment of God upon him. Jesus Himself offered little cause for hope regarding the generation that heard Noah's preaching, and perished in the Flood, indicating that the same dullness to the preaching of the gospel will characterize the age before the coming of the Son of Man.

*For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be.*

(Matthew 24:38-39)

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<sup>222</sup> Trapp, *John Commentary on the Old and New Testaments* (Eureka, CA: Tanski Publications; 1997); 38.



which Noah entered the ark, and the Deluge commenced. The same specificity will be used to designate when the ark came to rest in the mountains of Ararat (*cp.* Gen. 8:4), but other than that reference we have no indication what significance the exact day of the exact month held for Moses.

The description of the Flood at its beginning gives every indication of a sudden and cataclysmic event that would have taken everyone completely by surprise. One doubts that even Doppler radar would have given warning of this 'flash flood.' One wonders if there were even any clouds in the sky. The water came at the earth from two directions: rains from above and torrents or fountains of water from the deep. This is reminiscent of the separation of the waters at Creation,

*Then God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." God made the expanse, and separated the waters which were below the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse; and it was so.*

(Genesis 1:6-7)

It is the suddenness of the catastrophe that the Lord Jesus alludes to in that passage quote earlier from the Olivet Discourse, to describe eschatologically how the end of the age will also come suddenly, when it is not expected and with no prior warning. "The language is highly figurative, intended to convey a vivid idea of the awful inundation, proceeding at the same time from two opposite sources, atmospheric and subterranean receptacles."<sup>223</sup> It is a description that begs the reader to pause and to visualize the horrific scene unfolding.

What a scene of consternation and dismay must that day have exhibited, on the part of those who were left behind! The manner in which the rains set in would leave little or no hope of their being soon over. It was not a common rain: it came in torrents, or, as we should say, in a manner as though heaven and earth were come together. The waters of the subterranean cavities from beneath, and

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<sup>223</sup> Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown; 90.



of the clouds from above, all met together at God's command, to execute his wrath on guilty men.<sup>224</sup>

*On the very same day Noah and Shem and Ham and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them, entered the ark, they and every beast after its kind, and all the cattle after their kind, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth after its kind, and every bird after its kind, all sorts of birds. So they went into the ark to Noah, by twos of all flesh in which was the breath of life. Those that entered, male and female of all flesh, entered as God had commanded him; and the LORD closed it behind him. (7:13-16)*

In light of the brevity we have observed throughout the first chapters of Genesis, the recapitulation in this section is quite remarkable. The sense of the Hebrew in this passage is not that Noah and his family, as well as all of the animals, entered the ark on a single day, but rather that on the seventh day, the seventeenth day of the second month, etc., the work of boarding and stocking the ark was completed. The passage is seemingly repetitive, but the summary here gives less the sense of the progressive character of the work being done, as of the finished nature both of the work and of God's long-suffering with mankind. The passage drives to the final clause of verse 16, "*and the LORD closed it behind him.*"

There is a very practical aspect to this phrase, for one may wonder how Noah himself might have closed the door to the ark, and then sealed it against the impending rain and flood. One cannot imagine his enlisting the help of his neighbors, as the rain began to fall and the depths of the earth were spouting forth torrents of water! It is conceivable that he may have rigged up a block & tackle system for closing the door from inside, but clearly the intent of the narrative is that Noah was never intended to close the ark by himself, any more than he was to gather the animals by himself. Salvation is of the Lord, even in its typical manifestations.

There was a great deal that was mysterious and miraculous concerning the events of the last week before the Deluge broke. For over one hundred years the people had enjoyed and abused the patience of the Lord, while we can

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<sup>224</sup> Fuller; 34.

imagine Noah both preaching their imminent destruction and building this odd contraption in the midst of their habitation. All during this long age the events of each day, each week, and each year are mundane in the true sense of the term: of the earth. There is no real need to introduce the miraculous into Noah's construction of the ark; it is not an unreasonable feat for the labor of four men over a span of 120 years. But, frankly, during the final seven days things start to get really weird.

It is not hard to consider that Noah's neighbors thought him somewhat cracked, and probably had long since hardened their hearts and closed their ears to him. He was probably no longer even the butt of jokes, and the passing of so many years caused their hearts to grow calloused to his preaching as they also probably doubted that what he prophesied would ever come to pass. Then, somewhat all of a sudden, Noah starts stocking his floating box with grain and wine and other supplies of life, probably in very large quantities. Noah and his family begin 'moving in' to their ark.

This strange occurrence is then followed by a steady procession of all manner of animal and bird life to the ark, in pairs, under the influence of an intuition far wiser than that of the people witnessing it. The narrative does not leave the reader with the impression of Noah and his sons herding the animals to the ark, but rather the animals peacefully gathering themselves to Noah, and in the requisite numbers and pairings, and then just as peacefully entering their stalls on the ark. They came, just as Noah built the ark, *as God commanded*. And when the procession was ended, Noah and his sons and their wives followed the animals onto the ark...with the door still wide open. It is evident that these odd events did not bring Noah's neighbors to repentance, but it is not unreasonable to consider that they did instill a heightened sense of curiosity within them: a wondering, perhaps, just what was going to happen next. Undoubtedly many scoffed - the biblical record assures us that there are many scoffers in every age - who considered that Noah had finally cracked, and humored themselves with

the thought that the old fool would soon have to admit his folly and move back into his house. But one wonders if that cavalier attitude was prevalent on this seventh day, the last day of the long-suffering of God in that generation.

The closing of the ark by God was the exclamation point upon all that Noah had said and all that he had done over the previous 120 years. More than that, it typifies the true nature of salvation with regard to the surrounding world – there is an impenetrable barrier between the world of sin and a holy God. The closed door became, as it were, the un-rent veil of the tabernacle, or the flaming sword at the east of Eden. It was the historic equivalent of the door to the marriage feast that permitted entrance to five of the virgins, and shut the other five out forever. “Mercy’s gate was shut, the time of longsuffering had come to a close.”<sup>225</sup>

*Then the flood came upon the earth for forty days, and the water increased and lifted up the ark, so that it rose above the earth. The water prevailed and increased greatly upon the earth, and the ark floated on the surface of the water. The water prevailed more and more upon the earth, so that all the high mountains everywhere under the heavens were covered. The water prevailed fifteen cubits higher, and the mountains were covered. All flesh that moved on the earth perished, birds and cattle and beasts and every swarming thing that swarms upon the earth, and all mankind; of all that was on the dry land, all in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, died. Thus He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky, and they were blotted out from the earth; and only Noah was left, together with those that were with him in the ark. The water prevailed upon the earth one hundred and fifty days. (7:17-24)*

Each of the elements of this final summary have been touched upon at some point earlier in the narrative. The deed has been done, and with the effectiveness one would expect from God, “*Thus He blotted out every living thing...*” This event forms the common curtain in the backward view of the most ancient histories. “The era of the flood is the highest point in antiquity to which heathen chronology goes.”<sup>226</sup> All of the ancient cultures have their flood narrative, and all have some recollection of a race of men who lived on the other

<sup>225</sup> Spurgeon, Charles *Shut In or Shut Out*; Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit; Volume 27:1881; 449.

<sup>226</sup> Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown; 101.

side of that curtain. But the earlier side is shrouded in myth and legend; the Flood itself marks the beginning of time as the Chaldeans, the Sumerians, the Greeks, and the Chinese knew it. The Flood was a new creation, and the 'Noah figure' in each ancient legend became the new father of the race. Thus far the similarities between the stories and the biblical account end.

Only the Genesis story ties the Deluge to human sin, and the inundation of the earth to divine and holy wrath. This was not the capricious act of pagan gods annoyed at the amount of noise that mankind was making. This was rather a harbinger of events to come, when once more the earth will be purged of all that is wicked, burned clean from the sin which has corrupted it, and a New Earth will arise on the other side. It is a reminder set in the annals of all people, that God is serious in His hatred of sin, and while He is eminently long-suffering – even more so, it would seem, than in the days of Noah – the final week and the final day of that divine patience will truly come. Those who are in the One of whom Noah's ark is a type and shadow, Jesus Christ, will alone escape the wrath to come, and will enter into the life that is promised on the 'other side.'

*Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.*

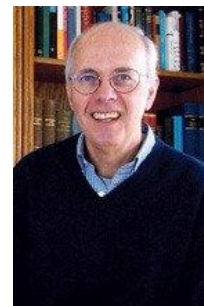
(II Peter 3:11-13)

**Week 11: The Great Flood – Part II****Text Reading: Genesis 8:1 - 22**

*“The old world was buried in the flood,  
that a new order of things might rise from its grave.”*  
(Alfred Edersheim)

We have seen on numerous occasions the connection between the Flood narrative and that of Creation, for indeed the world was ‘created’ anew after the Flood. Moses intends for his readers to hear the echoes of Genesis 1 in the narrative of Genesis 7 and 8. For instance, in the first verse of Chapter 8 we read that God “*sent a wind to pass over the earth.*” Now clearly the purpose of the wind was to accelerate the recession of the water and the drying of the land, but it should not escape our notice that the word used, *ruach*, is identical to Genesis 1:2, “*and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.*” The word for ‘wind’ in 8:1 is the same as that for ‘Spirit’ in 1:2, signifying that the same divine energy was at work in ‘re-creating’ the earth after the Flood as first created it from nothing in the beginning. This is not a work of ‘Nature’; rather it is an act of divine judgment from the start, and one of divine grace and mercy at the end. The allusions to Creation found throughout the Flood narrative serve as a constant reminder that this is a *new beginning*.

But this facet of the story as a new beginning also motivates the author to do more than reminisce, he also *foreshadows*. We have already seen the first mention of the *b’rith*, the ‘covenant,’ in Genesis 6:18. Here in Chapter 8 we find the first mention of an *altar* as a unique place of sacrifice and worship. And the terminology used here with reference to the covenant and to the altar as it pertains to Noah, foreshadows the same terminology that will be used subsequently in the Book of Genesis, not least with reference to Abraham. Both men, Noah and Abraham, re-



**John Sailhamer (b. 1946)**

present a 'new start' in the progressive unfolding of God's redemptive plan and history. Not 'new' as in a complete repudiation of the old, a 'change of direction.' Rather 'new' as in the diverting of a stream into a narrower channel, the headwaters remaining the same throughout. The source of Noah was Adam through Seth; the source of Abraham was Noah through Shem. But the similarities and consistency in God's purpose are highlighted by the equivalent similarities and consistency in the texts.<sup>227</sup> John Sailhamer draws an interesting harmony between the 'call' of Noah from the ark and the call of Abram from Ur of the Chaldees.<sup>228</sup>

**Noah**

*"And God said to Noah..."* (8:15)

*"Go out from the ark."* (8:16)

*"And Noah went out."* (8:18)

*"And Noah built an altar for the Lord."  
(8:20)*

*"And God blessed Noah..."* (9:1)

*"Be fruitful and multiply."* (9:1)

*"I will establish My covenant with you and  
your seed."* (9:9)

**Abraham**

*"And God said to Abram..."* (12:1)

*"Go out from your land."* (12:1)

*"And Abram went out."* (12:4)

*"And Abram built an altar for the Lord."* (12:7)

*"And I will bless you..."* (12:2)

*"I will make you a great nation."* (12:2)

*"I will establish My covenant between Me and you  
and your descendants after you..."* (17:7)

The style is definitely formulaic, and intentionally so. "Both Noah and Abraham represent new beginnings in the course of events recorded in Genesis. Both are marked by God's promise of blessing and his gift of the covenant."<sup>229</sup> One central feature in this literary comparison is the *monergism* in which the covenants are presented - it is *God* who calls and commands (though the man obeys, to be sure); it is *God* who blesses and promises; and it is *God* who established His covenant with the man. These are the first revelations of divine grace, the turning of God toward Man with favor - unmerited by anything

<sup>227</sup> Cp. John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan; 1992); 127f.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*; 128.

<sup>229</sup> *Idem.*

within Man (as we shall see in Genesis 8); wholly motivated and enacted from the divine will and pleasure. Moses intends for his readers to enter into the path of grace that he is cutting through the morass of human sin, and the terminology he uses provides the main markers of his way.<sup>230</sup>

*But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark; and God caused a wind to pass over the earth, and the water subsided. Also the fountains of the deep and the floodgates of the sky were closed, and the rain from the sky was restrained...* (8:1-2)

Verse 1 represents God as ‘remembering’ Noah, though one cannot thereby conclude that God had ‘forgotten’ about Noah on the ark. The language is that of *anthropopathos*, or ‘man-feeling.’ It is the standard way that the Bible, and God through the Bible, portrays divine sentiments in a manner comprehensible to man. Furthermore, the Hebrew word translated ‘remember’ is more nuanced than the English. Whereas the English ‘remember’ generally connotes recalling to mind, and implies at least a temporary lack of consciousness regarding something, the Hebrew term primarily denotes acting ‘upon a previous commitment to a covenant partner.’<sup>231</sup> Rather than interpreting the term as if God had forgotten Noah, it is more accurate to conclude that the *time had come* for God to fulfill His promise of delivering Noah, not only from the Flood, but also from the ark. The time had come – and therefore God ‘remembers’ Noah – to establish covenant with Noah and with the ‘new’ creation. The biblical sense of ‘remembering’ by God is a testimony to His faithfulness to His promises, as the prophet Habakkuk pleads so poignantly,

*LORD, I have heard the report about You and I fear.  
O LORD, revive Your work in the midst of the years,  
In the midst of the years make it known;  
In wrath remember mercy.*

(Habakkuk 3:2)

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<sup>230</sup> Sailhamer goes on to draw interesting connections between the description and purpose of Noah’s altar and that of Moses on Mt. Sinai. The consistent terminology highlights the continuity of God’s redemptive plan through the discontinuity of various covenants and dispensations.

<sup>231</sup> Waltke; 140.

This manner of speaking also indicates that God devoted His entire attention to the work of judgment through the Flood. It is as if Noah had been placed safely out of the way of wrath, and then God poured forth with intense concentration that wrath upon the rest of Creation. "In the anthropomorphic style of this narrative God is represented as wholly occupied with the 'strange work of judgment'; but at length, when the inundation had accomplished its missions, as taking careful interest in Noah and his companions in the ark."<sup>232</sup>

The gist of this language is to convey to human understanding that God does nothing by half measure. The divine judgment of the Deluge - and that of Fire that it foreshadows - is viewed as occupying the entirety of the divine attention and energy, so to speak, until all is accomplished. This is why the language of Chapter 7 is so graphic and violent, with only passing mention of the ark floating above the catastrophe. The reader is left with no doubt that the whole of prior Creation was 'wiped away,' just as God had promised it would be. However long the work of God may take, it will be completed fully, and then He 'remembers' His promise of mercy and grace, and returns His attention to Noah.

God has not finished completely with the world. The bold anthropomorphism makes the freedom the divine resolve for salvation especially impressive. A turn toward salvation has occurred, and it can be founded only on the fact that God remembered Noah.<sup>233</sup>

The narrative, while primarily emphasizing the acts of God in both judgment and mercy, also portrays the steadfast faith and patience of Noah. Noah waits on the ark and makes no attempt to leave it until he is commanded to do so by God. To be sure, Noah's patience is not inactive - and he will be 'testing the waters' literally through the sending out of birds from the ark. Still, he keeps the cover on the ark, perhaps not entirely sure that God is quite

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<sup>232</sup> Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown; 101.

<sup>233</sup> Von Rad; 128.



finished! We are not privy to the prayers of Noah during this time, but one can hardly doubt that they were fervent and continual. Still, God's attention, as it were, was directed elsewhere; and Noah was content to wait. Considering where he was, and what his daily occupation must have been, the rehearsal of the slow recession of the water – it would be over a year that Noah was in the ark – remains an abiding testimony to one of the least heralded characteristics of faith: *patience* in waiting upon the Lord.

*... and the water receded steadily from the earth, and at the end of one hundred and fifty days the water decreased. In the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark rested upon the mountains of Ararat. The water decreased steadily until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains became visible.* (8:3-5)

The Quest for Noah's Ark has occupied the attention and imagination of men for countless ages. Josephus spoke of the alleged location of the ark in his *Antiquities* (1<sup>st</sup> Century AD); Eusebius wrote of various legends of the ark's location in his *Ecclesiastical History* (4<sup>th</sup> Century AD); and numerous expeditions have attempted to discover the ark's resting place over the past two hundred years. Considering the propensity of man toward idolatry, it seems unlikely that the Lord would ever permit Noah's ark to be discovered, in the unlikely event that it still exists. All we are told in the text is that the ark rested "*upon the mountains of Ararat.*" The word 'mountain' is plural, indicating a range of mountains and not one single peak called 'Mt. Ararat.' That there is such a mountain today is to no significance, especially when one considers that this particular mountain was not always called 'Ararat.'

Ararat is synonymous with Urartu, a place name found in the Hebrew Scriptures as well as in ancient Babylonian texts. The location of Ararat/Urartu is generally conceded to be in the area of modern-day Armenia, between Turkey and Kurdistan, where there is a significant mountain range framing an elevated plateau.

The Assyrian kings wrote about battles against the Urartian tribes from the thirteenth century BC (c. 1286 BC) until the sixth century BC when Urartu was destroyed by the Medes. The name Urartu then vanished from history (until archaeologists re-discovered it in the 1800s) and was replaced by Ararat and Armenia in the vicinity as well as in English Bible translations, maps, etc. As history went on in the first and second millennia AD, the mountain became known as Ararat and the region as Armenia.<sup>234</sup>

Geographical descriptions of this area of the Near East are such as would make the preservation of the ark very unlikely, unless it was quickly overwhelmed by the snow & ice near the peak of one of the mountains. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia has this entry under 'Ararat.'

Notwithstanding its high elevation the region is fertile, furnishing abundant pasture, and producing good crops of wheat and barley, while the vine is indigenous. Moreover there are unmistakable indications that in early historic times there was a much more abundant rainfall in all that region than there is now, so that the climate was then better adapted to the wants of primitive man.<sup>235</sup>

While it certainly makes sense that God should providentially choose such a location for the ark to rest, and for Noah to begin again the populating and cultivating of the earth, it does not sound like a climate in which a wood structure would be long preserved. Still, the 'search for Noah's Ark' goes on,



John Warwick Montgomery (b. 1931)

and many modern Christians are captivated by reports of its discovery. One such claim, actually made almost a hundred years ago, was that a Russian pilot spotted the ark resting on the side of Mt. Ararat. This was just prior to the Russian Revo-

<sup>234</sup> <http://www.noahsarksearch.com/ararat.htm>

<sup>235</sup> *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans; 1983); 225.

lution of 1917, and conveniently all records of the pilot's flight and report have been lost. John Warwick Montgomery, a respected 20<sup>th</sup> Century scholar on the 'quest,' concludes in his *Quest for Noah's Ark* that while there is evidence that a Russian expedition to Mt. Ararat was launched in the years prior to the revolution, there is no proof that a Russian pilot 'spotted' the ancient ship, nor that any report of such a sighting reached the Czar's desk.<sup>236</sup> The main argument against the story is that no Russian airplane – and probably no airplane in the world – was capable of ascending above the 17,000' peak of Ararat in the era of the Great War.

Nonetheless, sightings are still reported, and photos are rife that allegedly show the ark's resting place in the mountains of Armenia. None of the photos have proven to be evidence of the ark, and all to date have been shown to constitute natural geological formations common to volcanic mountain ranges. Why the abiding



**Alleged Sighting of Noah's Ark**

fascination? What does the 'discovery' of Noah's Ark prove? We have already seen that a flood narrative is not only common, it is near universal among ancient cultures from across the world; the discovery of the ark's remains would only serve to corroborate universal testimony. Some may say that locating Noah's Ark would strengthen the claims of Christianity, but this is not so. The biblical narrative of the Flood is but one account – we believe it to be the one accurate account – among many, and while it bears witness to God's wrath and mercy with regard to mankind, it does not directly impinge upon the message of the Gospel.

Whatever advantages might be gained by the discovery of the ark would be quickly and massively outweighed by the tendency of all mankind toward idolatry. The history of the Christian Church is full enough of relics – pieces of

<sup>236</sup> Custance, Arthur *The Flood: Local or Global*; 103.

Jesus' robe, strands of Mary's hair, and, as one wag has said, enough slivers of the Cross to build Noah's Ark. Human credulity does not need the encouragement of another pilgrimage location, and it is for this reason that God probably disposed of the ark in the same mysterious manner that He used with the body of Moses. Christians should not waste their time seeking to satisfy sight, but rather should learn to walk by faith. Whether by biodegrading, glacial flow, or earthquake, it is highly likely that the ark is gone forever.

*Then it came about at the end of forty days, that Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made; and he sent out a raven, and it flew here and there until the water was dried up from the earth. Then he sent out a dove from him, to see if the water was abated from the face of the land; but the dove found no resting place for the sole of her foot, so she returned to him into the ark, for the water was on the surface of all the earth. Then he put out his hand and took her, and brought her into the ark to himself. So he waited yet another seven days; and again he sent out the dove from the ark. The dove came to him toward evening, and behold, in her beak was a freshly picked olive leaf. So Noah knew that the water was abated from the earth. Then he waited yet another seven days, and sent out the dove; but she did not return to him again. (8:6-12)*

This is a passage that lends itself to allegorical interpretation, for if we are frank in our exegesis, we do not quite see what the purpose of Noah's aviary experiments was – except that purpose which is stated: “to see if the water was abated from the face of the earth.” As the sequel will show, however, Noah did not intend to leave the ark – and perhaps could not physically leave the ark – until told to do so by God. Thus the sending of the birds constituted either impatience or curiosity, and based on the length of time Noah had spent on this floating barn, a case could easily be made for either option.

But such an interpretation often leaves the reader flat, and so commentators and preachers have embellished the raven and the dove with hidden significance, as well as the olive branch finally brought to Noah by the dove. Much is made of the raven being a scavenger, while the dove both docile and vegetarian. And Henry Ainsworth assigns to the olive branch the “glad

tidings of peace, by the ministry of the gospel, and of the Spirit."<sup>237</sup> The Pulpit Commentary is a classic example of the allegorical hermeneutic run amok,

While this passage has its natural, historical fitness, we cannot overlook its symbolical significance. It seems to set forth the two administrations of God, both of them going forth from the same centre of his righteousness in which his people are kept safe. The one represented by the carrion bird, the raven, the THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUDGMENT, which goes forth to and fro until the waters are dried up from off the earth – finding a resting place in the waters of destruction, though not a permanent rest; returning to the ark, as the beginning and the end of judgment is the righteousness of God. The dove is the emblem of DIVINE GRACE, spiritual life and peace. It cannot find rest in the waters of judgment until another seven days, another period of gracious manifestation, has prepared the world for it; then it brings with it the plucked-off olive leaf, emblem of retiring judgment and revealed mercy; and when yet another period of gracious manifestation has passed by, the dove shall return no more to the ark, for the ark itself is no more needed – the waters are abated from off the face of the earth.<sup>238</sup>

The author goes on, but it does not get any better. It is highly doubtful that Moses was thinking of the raven and the dove as two dispensations of God's economy. As for the olive branch, it is perhaps safest to conclude with John Calvin that "as the olive tree does not grow upon the mountains, and is not a very lofty tree, the Lord had given his servant some token whence he might infer, that pleasant regions, and productive of good fruits, were not freed from the waters."<sup>239</sup>

It is interesting to note, and probably of some significance, that there is a pattern of sevens in the days on which Noah sent forth the birds. This cadence indicates, at the very least, the knowledge of a seven day week from the most ancient of times, corroborating the Creation 'week' of Genesis 1 and 2. The

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<sup>237</sup> Ainsworth, *Annotations*; 49.

<sup>238</sup> *The Pulpit Commentary*; H. D. M. Spence, ed. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls; n.d.); 131.

<sup>239</sup> Calvin; *Genesis*; 279-280.

period of 40 days noted in this account becomes in the Bible a typical time of testing.

*Now it came about in the six hundred and first year, in the first month, on the first of the month, the water was dried up from the earth. Then Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and behold, the surface of the ground was dried up. In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry. (8:13-14)*

This is the passage within the narrative where most commentators attempt to calculate just how long Noah was on the ark. Delitzsch waxes tedious concerning whether the year was a solar (actual at 365 days or ‘approximate’ at 360 days, no less), or a lunar year of 354 days with alternating 29 and 30-day months. Using the lunar year common within later Judaism, Ainsworth calculates from the 17<sup>th</sup> day of the second month in Noah’s 600<sup>th</sup> year to the 27<sup>th</sup> day of the same month in Noah’s 601<sup>st</sup> year and arrives at a total of 365 days.<sup>240</sup> Delitzsch borrows another scholars enumeration from the text as 150 + 73 + 40 + 21 + 34 + 57 = 375 days, ten days longer than a actual solar year.<sup>241</sup> All such calculations assume a specificity that is not to be found in biblical narratives, and are of little consequence to the interpretation of the text. We are given a embarkation point – Noah entering the ark on the 17<sup>th</sup> day of the second month of his 600<sup>th</sup> year – and a point of departure – the 27<sup>th</sup> day of the second month of his 601<sup>st</sup> year. Noah was on the ark, in terms of the years of his own life, one year and ten day. By any calculation, this was a very long time.

*Then God spoke to Noah, saying, “Go out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and your sons’ wives with you. Bring out with you every living thing of all flesh that is with you, birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, that they may breed abundantly on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth.” So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives with him. Every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out by their families from the ark. (8:15-19)*

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<sup>240</sup> Ainsworth; 50.

<sup>241</sup> Delitzsch; 277.

“When the wrath of the Judge prevailed the waters rose; now grace and faithfulness to promise began to effect their work of deliverance, and the waters abated.”<sup>242</sup> The earth is dry, and God returns His attention and His favor to Noah, commanding him to go out of the ark and to ‘restart’ Creation. The command to “*be fruitful and multiply*” once again echoes the early narratives of Genesis, the continuity with Adam and Creation is retained by the fact that Noah, his family, and the animals were not this time created *ex nihilo* and *after their kind*. Rather they were collected onto the ark *after their kind*, preserved from the divine wrath that destroyed the balance of Creation, and then drawn from the ark to start everything over again. God’s wrath has been satisfied, as the next verses will show, and now mankind and the animal world will dwell together under His grace.

This is, it would seem, the beginning of ‘common grace.’ We have no instance of divine intervention during the antediluvian era; no example of God in any way restraining the sinful impulses of Man. Those impulses will be reiterated in the closing verses of this chapter, but the response of God is dramatically different than before. Mankind was left to its evil devices, and the chosen race of God was slowly narrowed down to one line, and finally to one man. The wickedness of man was compounded by long life, but it is reasonable to also conclude that this accumulating evil was left unchecked until it burst all bounds of divine patience. The antediluvians, therefore, witness to all readers the effect of unfettered sin, a picture of the world apart from common grace.

***Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. (8:20)***

This verse is the first mention in the Bible of an altar. It is not certain that this fact is of significance, though many commentators believe it is. The word translated ‘altar’ signifies a ‘high place,’ and the connotation is of upward

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<sup>242</sup> Delitzsch; 271.

orientation. The offering is made at a place higher than the surrounding terrain, and the flame & smoke of the burnt offering ascend upward toward heaven. It is possible that prior to the Flood those who worshipped God and brought sacrificial offerings to Him, did so either at or toward the gate of Eden, where the flaming sword and the angelic guard stood watch. Eden remained the earthly abode of God, as it were, "but with the flood God had swept paradise away, withdrawn the place of His presence, and set up His throne in heaven."<sup>243</sup> From now on the religion of Man, whether pagan or revealed, would look upward to heaven to appease or to find favor with the divine being(s).

For Noah this was a fresh start; all that he knew before was gone, and even the earthly terrain was unknown to him. It is likely that he did not know where he was, nor in what direction he had traveled, and could not have located the gate of Eden even if he had tried. Indeed, surveying the world after the waters receded, Noah had absolutely no reason to expect that that gate existed any longer. Therefore, apart from any explicit revelation from God, Noah built an altar and offered up every kind of clean animal in sacrifice. It is quite apparent that the Flood had made a tremendous impression upon Noah, and though he and his family had been preserved alive, such an awesome display of divine wrath called forth immediate supplication and expiation.

We are not told that Noah was instructed by God to do what he did, and one author actually asserts that Noah's sacrifice was not what God wanted him to do – and was a pitiful waste of animal life.<sup>244</sup> Such a view, however, betrays complete ignorance of the self-disclosure of God already encountered in the Book of Genesis, and sells short the piety and faith of Noah in understanding the proper approach of man to a holy God. Noah "*did what was right in the sight of God*" and the sequel assures us that the patriarch's sacrifice was fully acceptable to Him.

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<sup>243</sup> Keil & Delitzsch; 150.

<sup>244</sup> Cp. Leon Kass, *en loc.*



The motivation of Noah's heart is not revealed, though the approbation given by God in the next verse, and the renewal of the covenant with Noah, assure us that Noah's heart was in the right place. Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown are probably correct to say that "the sacrifice was both expiatory and Eucharistic."<sup>245</sup> Ellicott summarizes the event excellently,

One result of the flood was to sweep away all traces of the earthly paradise and of the subsequent abode of Adam; and it is probable also that Noah was removed far away from his previous home by the floating of the ark. Thus to him and his family it was a new earth, with no holy places, no spots hallowed by the past history of man. He therefore determines to consecrate the earth to Jehovah, who had been the object of the worship of his family since the days of Enos, and therefore builds an altar, the first mentioned in the Bible.<sup>246</sup>

*The LORD smelled the soothing aroma; and the LORD said to Himself, "I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done. (8:21)*

The anthropomorphism of God 'smelling' and being pleased with the smell, is a common biblical device for indicating the Lord's acceptance of the sacrifice and of the one who offers it. Paul uses the phrase 'sweet smelling' to indicate God's approval of the self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 5:2), and even of the sacrifice of financial support to the apostle's ministry (Philippians 4:18). There can be no doubt, despite the literary gymnastics of Leon Kass, that God approved Noah's sacrifice and had turned away His wrath. "The anger at sin which had caused the flood was now over, and there was peace between heaven and earth."<sup>247</sup>

What is remarkable about this particular verse is the 'reason' given for the divine promise never again to curse the ground for man's sake (or on account of man's sin). "*Cursing the ground*" here is defined as "*never again destroying every living thing.*" God promises to Himself - literally the phrase is "*and God spoke to*

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<sup>245</sup> Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown; 104.

<sup>246</sup> Ellicott; 43.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*; 44.

*His heart*" – that He would never again flood the earth with water on account of the sin of mankind. And what is the reason given? "*Because the intent of man's heart is only evil from his youth.*" This diagnosis of human depravity was in Chapter 6 the *justification of divine wrath*; here it has become the *justification of divine mercy*. One commentator flatly concludes that this 'proves' a contradiction between the Elohist and the Yahwist narrators (!).

Nevertheless, we must ask 'How can a reason for wrath become a reason for mercy?' Some scholars have cut the Gordian Knot by translating the particle as *although* rather than *because* or *for*, but most agree that the Hebrew word very rarely has the meaning of *although*, while it almost universally bears the weight of *because*. Other commentators highlight the nuance in this verse *from his youth*, which is absent from the earlier diagnosis in Chapter 6. But a comparison of the two passages seems to indicate a synonymous relationship, with minor adjustments in wording that are probably not as significant as scholars have made out.

*Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually...* (6:5)

*...for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth.* (8:21)

It is hard to see how human depravity being 'from youth' is somehow a mitigating condition; if anything, this seems to make man's plight even worse and more deserving of divine wrath. Yet the fact that every man is '*conceived in sin and brought forth in iniquity*' is here found to be the *reason* why God would never again destroy the earth with water. What are we to make of this? For one thing, though certainly not the focal point of the passage, we may conclusively derived the doctrine of Total Depravity from these two passages, written long before the Apostle Paul so fully indicted man in Romans 3. Spurgeon, in a sermon on Genesis 8:21, says, "It seems impossible to construct a sentence which

should more distinctly express [the human soul's] *total* corruption than this."<sup>248</sup>  
He drives the point home with his customary thoroughness,

Truly if we cannot see the doctrine here, it is probable we never shall see it anywhere; and we have in ourselves, in our own blindness, a sure proof of how true it is...If any man is determined to turn Scripture upside down and pervert the truth, he may escape from the doctrine of the total depravity of the human race; but surely if we take the Bible as it stands, we may boldly say that if it does not teach that man is evil, thoroughly evil, then it does not teach anything at all.<sup>249</sup>

But how does the total depravity of the human heart *justify* God in determining never to destroy the earth again by water? Simply because such a course of wrath not only removes the possibility of redemption, it just does not work. The flood may have cleansed the earth for a time, but it did nothing to cleanse the heart of Man. And it is not the intent of God to destroy His chief creation, but rather to redeem for Himself a people out of this fallen race. From henceforth God would no longer deal with mankind on the basis of retributive justice – nor would He allow man to achieve the age and ‘experience’ in sin as before the Flood. He would withhold the ultimate display of His righteous anger until one day when He would pour it out upon His Son, the perfect sacrifice. But in the meantime He would *not* withhold His restraining grace, keeping mankind from attaining the height of wickedness that called forth the Deluge. “God would exercise forbearance towards him; and instead of destroying the world again on his account, place it under an established economy of grace, which would secure a continuance of fruitful seasons.”<sup>250</sup>

Thus begins the language of Common Grace, the biblical doctrine that God *sends rain on the just and the unjust* and providentially *appoints every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and*

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<sup>248</sup> Spurgeon, C. H. *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit; Volume 11* (1865); 100.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*; 102.

<sup>250</sup> Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown; 104.

*the boundaries of their habitation.* The closing verse of Genesis 8 echoes through the rest of Scripture and through human history since the Flood, as the gracious countenance of God toward His Creation, the preserving force of Common Grace as the way is made clear for the Promised Seed, and ultimately for the kingdom of God.

*While the earth remains,  
Seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat,  
And summer and winter, and day and night  
Shall not cease.* (8:22)

**Week 12: The Noaic Covenant****Text Reading: Genesis 9:1 - 29**

*"In the experience of awe and reverence before paternal authority  
is the germ of awe and reverence for the divine."  
(Leon Kass)*

Evangelical Christians are not often known for being environmentalists. In fact, it is more the case that evangelicals tend to oppose as liberal and godless propaganda and 'gaia worship' anything that smacks of ecology, sustainability, or environmentalism. We cringe when people speak of Mother Earth or Mother Nature, knowing that the Earth and all it contains belongs to the *Father* God, who is its Creator and Governor and Judge. Ironically, this knowledge ought to make evangelicals the most ardent environmentalists - or at least the most sane - and that because of the events we have been studying over the past few chapters of Genesis. These events portray the Earth brought to *anthropogenetic* destruction - manmade catastrophe, and that by pollution. Only the pollution was moral rather than physical and chemical: the corruption of the Earth by human sin. The evangelical *knows* both that Man is the divinely ordained steward of the Earth, and that Man is uniquely and supremely capable of destroying the Earth. These two principles ought to motivate environmentalist thinking among evangelicals that is biblically-based, while also being scientifically rational.

What should be the evangelical's response to the 'climate change' hysteria sweeping the globe today? Do we deny that the world is getting warmer? Not necessarily. Do we deny that at least some of that warming may be *anthropogenetic* - caused by mankind? Not necessarily. Do we deny that this phenomenon will destroy the Earth? Yes, emphatically. There are several approaches that the evangelical may take with regard to the climate change debate (though the supporters of massive governmental spending to 'cool' the Earth are no longer calling it a 'debate'). The first is to show that the scientific jury is still out with regard to whether the planet is warming or not. The 1973

Nobel laureate in Physics, Iver Giaever, has argued that the aggregate rise in temperature from 1880 until 2015 of only 0.3%, indicating an ‘amazingly stable’ temperature profile. In a recent speech, Giaever said,

Everything is going to hell. But the facts are that in the last 100 years we have measured the temperature, it has gone up 0.8 degrees and everything in the world has gotten better. We live better, we have better work, better health, better everything – but if we go up another 0.8 degrees, we’re gonna die, I guess.<sup>251</sup>

Giaever is one of a handful of international physicists who have become Climate Change gadflies, consistently criticizing the hysteria that has come to be

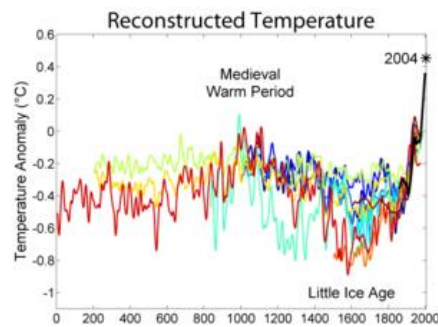


Iver Giaever (b. 1929)

associated with the ecological movement since the ‘crisis’ was announced by former U. S. Vice President Al Gore over a decade ago. Giaever travels and writes extensively, trying to present the counter-argument: that the Earth is not, in fact, warming appreciably, and possibly not even at all. He consistently raises several valid questions that are generally ignored by the Climate

Change lobby: *How* does one measure the temperature of the globe? and *What* is the optimal temperature of the Earth, anyway? “Maybe it’s two degrees warmer. Maybe it’s two degrees colder. No one has told me what the optimal temperature is for the whole Earth.”<sup>252</sup>

A second approach often taken by believing scientists is to accept that the Earth is warming, but to argue that global temperature shifts are common and historical, and not necessarily manmade. There is ample evidence from ice coring and other geological anomalies to show that the average temperature of large regions of the



<sup>251</sup> CNSNews.com; July 17, 2015 by Kathleen Brown.

<sup>252</sup> *Idem.*

Earth has varied significantly from century to century, with some periods of even recent history experiencing 'mini Ice Ages.' The most recent of these depressions in average temperature followed a period of unusual warmth hardly assignable to manmade causes, as it occurred during the early to mid medieval era, long before the Industrial Revolution brought wide scale pollution to the planet. Thus, the argument goes, even if the Earth is warming it is not to be seen as a catastrophic trend, nor as the result of human malfeasance or negligence.

Still, the evangelical scholar has an even firmer foundation upon which to rest his or her argument against climate change hysteria. That is the fact that not only is the Earth the creation of an all-knowing and all-powerful God, but that God has *covenanted* with the Earth to preserve it from future destruction. One might argue that the Noaic Covenant only posits that *God* will not destroy the planet again with water, but that this does not preclude the possibility of *man* doing the deed. But this is to misinterpret the divine purpose in covenanting – such monergistic covenants are made not merely to indicate God's wish or hope, but rather to show what *will* come to pass. For God to covenant that the Earth would not be destroyed on account of man's sin – which remains after the Flood – is the same as saying that the Earth will not be destroyed *even by* man's sin.

From this firm foundation the evangelical can build a rational worldview of environmentalism. Surely it cannot please God when man abuses the Earth; one can hardly argue that pollution is a good thing! The evangelical also has the luxury of knowing that time will prove him correct, though sadly the unbelieving environmentalists may get some rather stupid and regressive laws passed in the meantime. Sadly, too, they will take credit for the decrease in global temperature when it cyclically begins its decline (assuming that it is even rising). But the evangelical environmentalist does not answer to man, but to God. The Creation Mandate continues with Noah, as we see in Genesis 9, with the comforting divine promise that no matter how bad human sin waxes in the

centuries and millennia to come, God will preserve the Earth in the very cycles that liberal environmentalists are so hysterical about today.

*And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth."  
(9:1)*

It is well known among modern evangelicals that the chapter divisions in Scripture are not original. The current chapter and verse divisions of the English



**Stephen Langton (c. 1150-1228)** Bible are attributed to Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury in the early 13<sup>th</sup> Century. Langton was a busy man; he also was instrumental in the development of the Magna Carta, the milestone document of limited monarchy forced upon the unloved John I of England. Langton was a noted scholar of his time – a rarity among ecclesiastics in the Middle Ages – and his division of verses and chapters were by no means arbitrary. He did not always get it right; some would argue that he rarely got it right. But in this section of Genesis dealing with the life of Noah and the narrative of the Flood, at least Langton’s chapter divisions make sense. He seemed to have keyed on several “*and God...*” phrases as logically beginning new material.

Chapter 7 - “*Then the LORD said to Noah, ‘Enter the ark...’*”

Chapter 8 - “*And God remembered Noah...*”

Chapter 9 - “*And God blessed Noah and his sons...*”

The pattern will be repeated with regard to God and Abraham, as the reader is moved progressively through the development of the respective patriarchal covenant. The emphasis, once again, is upon the monergism of God – it is *God* who initiates each relational phase with the man; the man merely responds (and at times not even that). Through the living history of the lineage of the Seed we see the principle of Unconditional Election being established – in



the lives of the elect long before it is promulgated as a theological doctrine by Paul in the *Epistle to the Romans*. The major covenantal components of this God-to-man relationship are *call* and *blessing*. These features constitute hermeneutical markers that the student of Scripture should look for when reading the covenantal tracts of divine revelation; they will always be present if one is reading a true, divine covenant.

What we read in the opening verse of Chapter 9 is, of course, again reminiscent of the opening chapters of the Bible. Tied inexorably to the divine blessing is the propagation of the human race: *be fruitful and multiply*; the same divine ordinance that was given to Adam.

*God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."* (1:28)

In the beginning there was amity between Man and the lesser creatures: Man's dominion over the animal world was pacific (or was meant to be) and was willingly accepted by the lower echelons of God's Creation. Human sin changed all of that, and introduced horrific disorder into the entire life chain – it appears that the Flood was intended as much to wipe out the vast majority of the animal world as it was to eradicate the entire human race save eight souls. By divine grace, things remained peaceful during Noah's time on the ark, but the subsequent blessing of God, while tracking along the same lines as the Adamic blessing, contains words of foreboding.

*The fear of you and the terror of you will be on every beast of the earth and on every bird of the sky; with everything that creeps on the ground, and all the fish of the sea, into your hand they are given.* (9:2)

This is an odd statement to be found in the midst of a blessing – the announcement that a state of enmity now exists between Man and the animals; between Noah and those creatures who were only yesterday preserved by him

on the ark. Yet there is tangible grace in the pronouncement, for man after the Flood was both few and vulnerable. It takes little scientific wisdom to realize that Man is really no match for the animals within the animals' own domain. The notion that human beings evolved from lower animal forms is quite ludicrous – Man is woefully inadequate in his physical equipage for life in the wild. He is not as fast, nor as strong, nor are his teeth as sharp or his jaws as powerful, as the carnivores he must face in his halting evolutionary progress toward *Homo sapiens*. Frankly, early man would have been 'on the plate.'

This was the reality facing Noah as he disembarked (pun intended). Therefore it was an act of grace as well as of sovereign providence that God reinstated the relative hierarchy between His chief creation – Man – and the lesser orders, preserving it by instilling within the animal instinct an irrational dread and terror of Man. This dynamic has characterized the relationship of man to animal ever since: most animals, even the most predatory, will give man a wide berth, even in the animal's own domain. It is, to be sure, no hard & fast rule; innumerable members of the human race have been killed by animals. But in the main, the terror of Man still fills the heart of the animal kingdom. God has given all animals into Man's hands to do with as he will.

*Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as I gave the green plant. Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. (9:3-4)*

The diet of mankind is expanded to include meat, apparently for the first time – or at least for the first time as sanctioned by God. There is no explanation given for this permission, which at first glance seems a bit odd given the fact that the animal population has been greatly reduced by the Flood. Speculation abounds concerning postdiluvian man's greater need for protein, for diversion to his violent tendencies, etc., but there is simply no explanation given. Indeed, it appears the statement concerning eating meat is little more than a prelude to

what follows, which is a far more significant statement of overall biblical theology: the significance of *blood*.

Just as a limitation was placed upon Adam with regard to what he could and could not eat ("*from every tree...but from the tree in the midst of the garden...*") so also here there is the limitation placed upon the Noahide world against eating "*flesh with its life,*" that is, its blood. It is somewhat difficult to determine exactly what is meant by the phrase, but it is reasonable to interpret it within the context of ancient pagan practice, which included the eating of living meat and the drinking of blood. The prohibition is of a piece with the later Levitical rituals concerning the proper slaughtering of animals for meat, and is coordinate with the apostolic injunction that included a prohibition on animals that had been strangled.

*For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication...* (Acts 15:28-29)

The general tenor of such commandments has to do with the proper disposition of the blood of the animal once it has been slaughtered and before it is prepared as food. "The prohibition applies to the eating of flesh with blood in it, whether of living animals, as it the barbarous custom in Abyssinia, or of slaughtered animals from which the blood has not been properly drained at death."<sup>253</sup> This interpretation would also explain why animals were not to be strangled, and why animals who died of 'natural causes' or by other violent means were also forbidden as food.

One should not attempt to read into the Noaic commandment modern medical science concerning various bacteria that are prevalent in certain meats, nor to tease an optimum meat preparation method from these words.<sup>254</sup> The text gives the reason for the prohibition, and the reason given then becomes a central

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<sup>253</sup> Keil & Delitzsch; 152.

<sup>254</sup> Some believers interpret the prohibition as applying to any meat that is not prepared 'well done.'

tenet of biblical theology with regard to sacrifice and atonement: it is because the blood is the *life* of the animal, and the life belongs to God alone. Ellicott writes, "Of this hidden life the blood is the representative, and while man is permitted to have the body for his food, as being the mere vessel which contains this life, the gift itself must go back to God, and the blood as its symbol be treated with reverence."<sup>255</sup> Later God will give to the Israelites the blood of their sacrifices as atonement for their sins,

*And any man from the house of Israel, or from the aliens who sojourn among them, who eats any blood, I will set My face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement.* (Leviticus 17:10-11)

God is establishing a new principle among human civilization here after the Flood, one in which the sacredness of life is to be observed, guarded, and avenged. The divine monologue moves from the inherent value of animal blood to the even higher value of human blood, and to the reiteration of Man's unique position within Creation.

***Surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from every man, from every man's brother I will require the life of man.*** (9:5)

Literally "*your blood of your lives*" will God require at the hand (or claw) of whoever or whatever takes that life. If an animal kills, that animal is to be killed; the same applies to man. The additional caveat, "*from every man's brother,*" seems to be a powerful allusion to the first murder, in which Cain killed his brother Abel. In that case the death penalty was not exacted for the crime; Cain was merely exiled. In the New Order this will no longer be acceptable; capital punishment is now promulgated against both animal and man. "God, it seems, expects human bloodshed to continue, but it must no longer be tolerated;

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<sup>255</sup> Ellicott; 44.

homicide must no longer go unpunished.”<sup>256</sup> No conditions are applied as to the circumstances of the death – whether it was accidental, in self-defense, or ‘temporary insanity.’ We may, however, understand the later modifications of the term ‘murder’ to apply here as well, though one cannot definitively refute the commentators who interpret the pronouncement to be universal and without exception or mitigation.

This statement in Genesis 9 is the earliest in the Bible of that class of laws known as the *lex talionis* – the ‘eye for an eye’ law. Many moderns consider this legal principle to be both archaic and barbaric, but in fact it is an ancient statement of the principle ‘the punishment shall fit the crime.’ In an age when the penalty for most infractions was death, the *lex talionis* forced the legal system to weight the punishment in the same measure as the crime committed. The principle was also intended to cut across the social barriers that inevitably arise in every culture: the same penalty was due the same crime, regardless of the nobility or baseness of the one who committed it, or the one against whom it was committed. *Lex talionis* is remarkably civilized when properly interpreted, just as capital punishment, when rightly considered, is one of the highest possible statements regarding the value of human life. “Noahide law teaches that, at least with respect to life itself, every human being has a claim and a standing *equal* to our own. As the text soon makes clear, such equality can be grounded only in the (recognized) equal *humanity* of each human being.”<sup>257</sup>

*Whoever sheds man's blood,  
By man his blood shall be shed,  
For in the image of God He made man.  
As for you, be fruitful and multiply;  
Populate the earth abundantly and multiply in it.* (9:6-7)

God will require blood from the one who sheds blood, but significantly He requires it from the hand of man. Thus is introduced the ‘civil sword’ of

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<sup>256</sup> Kass; 181.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*; 183.

which Paul speaks in Romans 13, the power of the civil magistrate as God's vice-regent, to execute justice against evildoers.

*Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.*

(Romans 13:2-4)

This passage forever settles – or at least should settle – the question as to whether or not Man retained the *imago Dei* when Adam fell. The more detailed discussion of this point is reserved for the theological study, *Man & Sin*, but it is sufficient to the current point that God establishes the foundation of capital punishment *not* on revenge, *nor* on the security of human society, *but rather* on the affront that murder gives to the One whose image the victim bears. Andrew Fuller writes, “The reason for this law is not taken from the well-being of man, but man’s being made in the *image* of God.”<sup>258</sup> Leon Kass adds, “Manslaughter, by violating the image, violates also the divine original. Retribution, by vindicating this image, pays homage to the divine.”<sup>259</sup> One might go so far to say – and it undoubtedly sounds very odd to hear it – that capital punishment, rightly enacted and rightly viewed, is an act of worship. Consider Fuller’s analysis of the perennial debate concerning a government’s right to take life:

In defending the principles of civil and religious liberty against persecution for conscience’s sake, it has often been alleged that civil government has no right to restrain or punish man, but on account of their injuring their fellow men. That whatever is punishable by man is injurious to man is true, because all sin in some way or other is so; but to make this *the sole ground*, or *reason*, of punishment, is selfish and atheistical. It is making ourselves the chief end; whereas this is what God claims to himself at the hand of every man and body of men. The

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<sup>258</sup> Fuller; 38.

<sup>259</sup> Kass; 186.

cognizance of the civil magistrate ought indeed to be confined to what is civil and moral; but, in punishing men for immorality, he ought not merely to regard his own safety, nor even that of his community, but the honour of God; and if he is a good man, he will do so.<sup>260</sup>

*Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying, "Now behold, I Myself do establish My covenant with you, and with your descendants after you; and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you; of all that comes out of the ark, even every beast of the earth. (9:8-10)*

Here is the Noaic Covenant in its full glory, only alluded to prior to the Flood, now elaborated in full. It is not strictly a *redemptive* covenant except inasmuch as through it God promises to preserve the human race on earth, with the implication that the promised Seed of Woman would, of course, eventually come. The Noaic Covenant is, however, primarily a covenant of *preservation* rather than redemption: it is God covenanting monergistically with the entirety of Creation, and not just Noah. "The covenant with Noah binds together God's purposes in creation with his purposes in redemption. Noah, his seed, and all creation benefit from this gracious relationship."<sup>261</sup>



O. Palmer Robertson (b. 1937)

The terminology is emphatic, in which God assures Noah and his family of the security of this covenant – an issue that must have been on their minds as they came off the ark and felt the loneliness of the world. God multiplies the first person personal and possessive pronouns: "*I Myself do establish My covenant with you...*" It is here as it would be later in the covenant with Abraham, "*For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself.*"<sup>262</sup> Here is complete assurance, without condition (and, notably, without any comment by Noah, either). Leon Kass properly interprets

<sup>260</sup> Fuller; 38n.

<sup>261</sup> Robertson, O. Palmer *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed; 1980); 111.

<sup>262</sup> Hebrews 6:13

the monergistic nature of the covenant: "God here explicitly binds Himself to all of life - both human and animal - forever...God's promise is unilateral, one-sided, and unconditional...It expresses, from God's side alone, His voluntary and permanent self-restraint from the destruction of all life."<sup>263</sup> Kass goes on to show why such personal divine guarantee was needed: "Civilized life, in which human beings live partly for posterity, depends upon hope for the future."<sup>264</sup> Without the Noaic Covenant, there would indeed be little hope for the future.

*I establish My covenant with you; and all flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood, neither shall there again be a flood to destroy the earth." God said, "This is the sign of the covenant which I am making between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all successive generations; I set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a sign of a covenant between Me and the earth. It shall come about, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow will be seen in the cloud, and I will remember My covenant, which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and never again shall the water become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the cloud, then I will look upon it, to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." And God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that is on the earth." (9:11-17)*

Everybody loves to see a rainbow. Not only are they beautiful, they are universally known as harbingers of the storm's end. They are inherently peaceful, as if God has set it within the human heart to be calm in the presence of a rainbow. It is no detraction from the rainbow as the *seal* of the Noaic Covenant, that the phenomenon is caused naturally by the refraction of light off of water droplets, nor that the colors of the rainbow are the natural wavelength spectra of white (sun) light. God does not pretend in this passage that the rainbow is anything but natural; He merely establishes it as the sign *for Him* as well as for Man, that the divine wrath would never again burn so hot as to eradicate all of life in the manner of the Deluge.

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<sup>263</sup> Kass; 188.

<sup>264</sup> *Idem.*



Let us learn to look upon it, not only in the natural causes, as it is an effect of the sun in a thick cloud; but as a sacramental sign of the covenant of grace; a monument of God's both justice in drowning the world, and mercy in conserving it from the like calamity.<sup>265</sup>

Through all of this discourse Noah is strangely silent; no comment is recorded from the patriarch or from his sons. One does not know how to take this; even Abram answered back to God! Perhaps the best conjecture is the one that sees Noah in complete and almost catatonic awe and fear, both at the spectre before his eyes of an emptied earth, and at the mercy of God to condescend not only to preserve his family alive through the Flood, but to enter into a covenant with him, an undeserving sinner. The durability of Noah's faith up to this point prevents us from interpreting his silence as unbelief; it is better to view the faithful patriarch as simply awestruck. That his mind and heart were not yet fully wrapped around all that had occurred, and was to occur, may be indicated in the succeeding verses, in which Noah, to borrow a later sailing euphemism, finds himself 'three sheets to the wind.'

*Now the sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem and Ham and Japheth; and Ham was the father of Canaan. These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the whole earth was populated.* (9:18-19)

This announcement, again, of the names of Noah's three sons is preparatory to what follows, the narrative of Ham's disrespect toward his father. It is significant, however, that Moses states clearly that the whole earth was populated from the progeny of these three men, the sons of Noah. This statement is not germane to the immediate narrative of Noah's drunkenness and Ham's sin, but rather to the sequel in Chapters 10 and 11 where the nations of the world are set forth. In typically simple fashion, Moses reiterates the complete destruction of the human race alive before the Flood: all subsequent human

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<sup>265</sup> Trapp; 41.

societies now trace their heritage to Noah through either Shem, or Ham, or Japheth.

*Then Noah began farming and planted a vineyard. He drank of the wine and became drunk, and uncovered himself inside his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it upon both their shoulders and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were turned away, so that they did not see their father's nakedness.* (9:20-23)

A great deal is said in evangelical commentaries regarding Noah's sin of drunkenness related in this passage; much more, indeed, than is said by the Holy Spirit. Ellicott, among others, theorizes that Noah did not know about the intoxicating power of wine. "Scarcely aware, perhaps, of the intoxicating qualities of the juice which he had allowed to ferment, he drank to excess, and became the first example of the shameful effects of intemperance."<sup>266</sup> Fuller pontificates,

It was very lawful for Noah to partake of the fruits of his labour; but Noah sinned in drinking to excess. He might not be aware of the strength of the wine, or his age might render him sooner influenced by it: at any rate we have reason to conclude, from his general character, that it was a fault in which he was 'overtaken.'<sup>267</sup>

While there can be no doubt that a lifestyle of drunkenness – one who *lingers long over the wine* – is a reprehensible sin according to both Scripture and nature, one must also accept that nothing is said in this passage concerning Noah's drunkenness. The sin occasioned by Noah's excess drinking was that of his youngest son, Ham. Indeed, there is nothing in the story that indicates the patriarch did anything more than drink and go to bed – he did not take his chariot out for a spin while 'under the influence,' he did not berate or otherwise abuse any member of his family: he simply had too much wine and fell

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<sup>266</sup> Ellicott; 46.

<sup>267</sup> Fuller; 40.

asleep...apparently naked...in his own tent. The strong prejudice against wine that exists within evangelical Christianity of the last two centuries ought to be tempered by the psalmist's undoubtedly thankful acknowledgement of the divine source of the vine, in a passage that must have characterized Noah's time immediately after the Flood.

*He causes the grass to grow for the cattle,  
And vegetation for the labor of man,  
So that he may bring forth food from the earth,  
**And wine which makes man's heart glad,**  
So that he may make his face glisten with oil,  
And food which sustains man's heart.* (Psalm 104:14-15)

The central theme of this part of the narrative is Ham's sin of *uncovering* or *exposing* the nakedness of his father. It was a violation of the Fifth Commandment thousands of years before that divine writ was carved into the stone tablets of Sinai. Ham was either offended or humored by his father's condition, and instead of 'covering' Noah's nakedness - by at least keeping the whole matter a secret - Ham gossiped to his brothers, thinking that they, too, would be titillated by the scene. The overarching purpose of the narrative - the *reason* that it has been recorded for posterity - is to reestablish the lineage of the Seed (through the lineage of Shem) and to begin to explain the *sins of the Amorite* (the Canaanites) that were soon to be avenged by the children of Israel under Moses and Joshua.

The circumstance of the sin of Ham, however, is the violation of the proper respect that is due to parents as earthly representatives of divine authority. "None but a fool will make a mock at sin in any one; but for children to expose and sneer at the sin of their parents is wickedness of the most aggravated kind. It indicates a heart thoroughly depraved."<sup>268</sup> But this particular situation is aggravated. The issue of *nakedness* apparently speaks to the

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<sup>268</sup> Fuller; 40. Fuller, as mentioned above, considers Noah's drunkenness to be sin.

procreative power of Noah as the father – later the same phrase, “*uncovering nakedness*,” will be used to describe sexual sins within Israel. Ham’s disrespect toward Noah became an attack by the son upon the father in terms not only of his patriarchal authority, but also as the one whose ‘seed’ or power brought the son into the world. Kass writes, “In his simple act of shameless viewing of uncovered nakedness, he symbolically overturns his father both as source of life and as moral authority.”<sup>269</sup>

Shem and Japheth react differently from their brother Ham, and are undoubtedly appalled by Ham’s lack of respect for their father’s dignity. The actions of the two older brothers are to solve the problem without becoming complicit in the sin: to cover their father’s nakedness without themselves viewing it. These two actions – that of Ham and that of Shem and Japheth – form a paradigm of opposites in how men react to the sins of other men: do they ‘uncover’ or do they ‘cover.’ If we accept that Noah’s drunkenness was a sin, then this whole narrative teaches somewhat of a hierarchy of offence: it is a lesser offense to get drunk than it is to uncover one’s father’s nakedness, even if the latter was rendered so by way of sin. But this can be a difficult ethical knot to untie, for at what point is the ‘covering’ little more than a ‘cover up’?

If we accept the narrative as written, in which there is no indication of fault on the part of Noah, then the actions of Shem and Japheth are put in their proper perspective: they *restored* the dignity of their father rather than allow it to be further maligned. One might imagine Ham telling various family members of Noah’s plight – lying naked on his mat in his tent – and leading a stream of curious children and nephews to behold the patriarch in his nakedness. Shem and Japheth would have none of this, and their reward would be forthcoming. Perhaps we embellish the story too much, though undoubtedly there was more to the scene that is recorded in the text. But the purpose of this analysis is to allow Shem and Japheth the proper accolades of doing right by their father,

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<sup>269</sup> Kass; 207.

while not condemning the father with strictures that may not have existed in his day. One thing is clear: the narrative lays all fault at the feet of Ham.

*When Noah awoke from his wine, he knew what his youngest son had done to him. So he said,*

*Cursed be Canaan;*

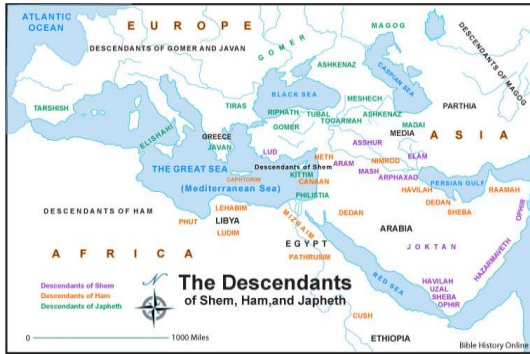
*A servant of servants*

*He shall be to his brothers.*

**(9:24-25)**

It is more difficult to discern the role of Canaan in the plot. He is mentioned several times in the text; once without reference to his father's sin with regard to his grandfather's nakedness (vs. 18) and then in the midst of his father's disrespect toward his grandfather (vs. 22), and finally as the focus of Noah's curse (vs. 25). Commentators have taken two approaches to this dilemma. The first is to supply words to the text that somehow bring the curse down upon Ham and not Canaan; the other is to somehow implicate Canaan in the sin of Ham in the first place. To the former there is no manuscript evidence that would support any rendering other than we have here in the New American Standard version, in which the curse is pronounced squarely upon Canaan. To the latter, there is no indication within the text that Canaan was the first to discover Noah's compromising situation, and then allegedly to tell his father, Ham, who then spread the news to Noah's other two sons, Shem and Japheth. The text as it stands is critically without challenge: Ham is the one who sinned; Canaan is the one who was cursed.

That it was *Canaan* who is mentioned from among Ham's several sons is not as difficult to explain. The curse alighted upon the sons of Ham in general, including Mizraim (Egypt), and Cush (Ethiopia), and Put (Libya), and historians of the ancient world give every indication that these cultures were particularly depraved in terms of sexuality. But *Canaan* was the son and tribe whose initial inheritance of land would be given over to the people of Jehovah, the nation of Israel. And it was during the years leading up to the Israelite invasion of Canaan



that Moses was writing this narrative. In preparation for the moment, God directed Noah to address the Hamitic curse particularly to Canaan, who was sovereignly ordained to bear the brunt of its fulfillment at the hands of Moses

and Joshua. Commentators who accept that the curse was directed against Ham, because it was Ham who committed the outrage against the dignity and reputation of his father, usually settle on the appropriateness of naming Canaan as indicative of the future dispossession by Israel of the Canaanite lands. “It is manifest... that [the curse] was directed *principally* in the line of Canaan; and that it was related by Moses for the encouragement of Israel in going up against his descendants, the Canaanites.”<sup>270</sup>

But there may be another and more plausible explanation for why it is Canaan who is cursed instead of Ham. In Middle Eastern culture – a culture that has not changed appreciably over the millennia – the father’s dignity is tied directly to his son. This is such that if a son is somehow honored, the father is directly honored, and if the son is shamed, the father is shamed. The father of a famous man becomes known as *Abu* followed by the son’s name: *Father* of so-and-so. To bless a man within this culture, one would naturally bless the man’s son – knowing that the blessing did not really belong to the son, but rather to the father. The converse is true: to curse a man, one curses his son or sons – for to curse a son is to curse the father. For Noah to curse Ham directly would be to curse himself, for he is Ham’s father.

The concept behind this is very biblical, stemming perhaps from Genesis 5:3 where we read that Adam became the father of a son *in his own likeness*. In a

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<sup>270</sup> Fuller; 41.

way far closer to the biblical testimony than to modern Western culture, a son is a replication of his father, and his life is a mirror of the father's life, for good or for ill. The relationship between a father and his son(s) is the closest facsimile between that of Man and his Creator; again, for good or for ill.

Thus the lineage of Ham is cursed, primarily in the branch of Canaan. When one traces the migration and development of the Semitic and Japhetic peoples - which we will have occasion to do during the exposition of Genesis 10 - it becomes apparent at least through much of human history, that the lineage of Ham became the *servant of servants*, or lowliest of servants, to the descendants of his two older brothers. But the curse is not ethnic or political; it is supremely spiritual, as the following verses bear out.

*He also said,*

*"Blessed be the LORD,*

*The God of Shem;*

*And let Canaan be his servant.*

*May God enlarge Japheth,*

*And let him dwell in the tents of Shem;*

*And let Canaan be his servant."*

(9:26-27)

Shem and Japheth are rewarded for their faithfulness in covering their father's nakedness. Or perhaps it is better to say that Noah blessed his two oldest sons in accordance with their faithfulness, which was a manifestation of their deserving such a blessing. The principle blessing goes to Shem, who is not thereby to be assumed as the oldest. We have already seen that primogeniture means nothing in biblical history; if anything, God delights in blessing the younger over the older - He certainly seems to make a habit of doing so throughout redemptive history. Note how the curse upon Ham through Canaan forms a refrain through the blessings pronounced upon Shem and Japheth, a trebling of the curse.

Covenant language is used of Shem, in which Jehovah is called "*the God of Shem*" as He will later be called the *God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*. This, of

course, constitutes the chief part of the Semite blessing: that the lineage of the Seed of Woman would persist through the lineage of Noah's son Shem, through whom would come Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and, of course, the Christ according to the flesh. "Shem is henceforth the centre of sacred history. If God hereafter provides Himself with a family of salvation, and out of these with a people of salvation, this will take place among the posterity of Shem."<sup>271</sup>

That the second stanza referring to Japheth is, indeed, a blessing is deduced from the common refrain, *And let Canaan be his servant*. But Japheth's blessing is not as high as Shem's; indeed, the blessing upon Japheth is *through* Shem: "*and let him dwell in the tents of Shem.*" This does not indicate possession of the Semitic homeland, but rather blessing under the Semitic 'tent.' The bulk of the Japhetic blessing is temporal – he will be 'expanded,' which is a pun upon his name, which means 'expansion.' Japhethites will travel the globe, as they have done, but will find their truest blessing '*in the tents of Shem.*' This can only mean the inheritance by the Gentiles of the one true religion entrusted to the descendants of Shem. Delitzsch summarizes,

The fulfillment is palpable: the language of the New Testament is the speech of Javan<sup>272</sup> dwelling in the tents of Shem, the gospel is the proclamation of salvation translated from Semitic into Japhetic, and Gentile Christians are for the most part Japhethites dwelling in the tents of Shem.<sup>273</sup>

***Noah lived three hundred and fifty years after the flood. So all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years, and he died. (9:28-29)***

This *toledoth* is ended in a similar fashion as the *toledoth* of Adam in Chapter 5, with the total number of years of Noah's life, followed by the simple statement of his death. Noticeable is the absence of Noah's having begotten "*other sons and daughters.*" Apparently Shem, Ham, and Japheth were his only children. A fact significant in the next chapter, the Table of Nations.

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<sup>271</sup> Delitzsch; 298.

<sup>272</sup> A son of Japheth: *cp.* Gen. 10:2.

<sup>273</sup> Delitzsch; 298.



**Week 13:** *Toledoth Beni-Noe - The Generations of the Sons of Noah*

**Text Reading:** **Genesis 10:1 - 32**

*"Nothing could be more certain than that what chance cannot begin the production of in a moment, chance cannot complete the production of in an eternity."*  
(Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield)

The theory of Evolution has undergone many mutations in the years since Charles Darwin published his *Origin of Species* (1859); one might say that the theory has mimicked itself: successful variations on the theme are manifested by their survival to the next generation of evolutionary biologists. But two aspects of the original theory (which, by the way, long predates Darwin) have remained constant. The first: that life began by a chance chemical and electrical event, without the interposition of divine assistance. The second: that the process of evolution from genus to genus and specie to specie has followed an arbitrary and incremental process of mutation as organisms have adapted themselves to better survival within their changing environment. But each of these basal principles of Evolutionary Theory suffers a severe statistical handicap, and one that has perhaps never been adequately addressed by evolutionary scientists.

In the first instance, the statistical conundrum is twofold. One the one hand, there is no natural reason why the process of life originating by way of electro-chemical chance events should not be continuing on the planet, though no evidence of this has been discovered. There are notable instances of people surviving being struck by lightning, but none of something inanimate coming to life by that method (and we remember, of course, that Mary Shelly's monster was fiction). The second aspect of the statistical problem with the evolutionary origin of life is that there should be multiple different lifeforms, of conceivably infinite different material organization, at the bottom of the evolutionary life chain. The notion that these initiatory single-cell organisms should end up being so uniform in their structure and function is, to all intents and purposes,

statistically impossible. Furthermore, given no evidence of their being replenished by continuing electro-chemical events, the theory of Evolution would logically posit their extinction, as subsequent organisms evolve to take their place. But this is, indeed, far from the case.

However, as interesting as this argument might be to pursue, it does not pertain to our current study. It is along the second foundational premise of evolutionary science that we come to the topic and content of Genesis 10. The statistical chasm with regard to the incremental and arbitrary evolution of organisms of greater and greater complexity is, that the process should end up with Man - recognized universally as the paragon of Evolution - who is in all meaningful biological senses, a singular specie. The evolutionary process most certainly would have produced (if one allows the mechanism in the first place) *innumerable* different species of organisms that might be classified within a *genus* called *Homo* or Man. But the *unity* of the human race is a fact beyond reasonable doubt, especially since the discovery of DNA. Though undoubtedly disqualified from participating in the Evolution Debate due to his vocation as a theologian, Franz Delitzsch's comment pertaining to the unity of the human race nonetheless presents an unanswerable objection to the entire theory.

The races of man are in fact not different species of one genus, but different variations of one species, as testified by the congruence of physiological and pathological phenomena in all men, by identity of anatomical structure, mental powers and features, by the same duration of life, by equally liability to illness, by the same normal temperature of body and the same average pulse, the same form of spermatozoa, the same period of gestation, and by unlimited fertility in the intermixture of all races.<sup>274</sup>

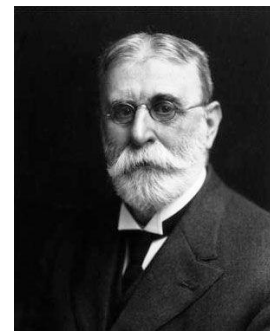
Delitzsch wrote these words approximately seventy years before Watson and Crick discovered the helical structure of living organisms, DNA. Since that latter discovery, the unity of the human race has simply been put beyond all

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<sup>274</sup> Delitzsch; 301-302.

reasonable doubt or argument, questioned only by avowed racists. But this universally recognized phenomenon of *unity* within the human race (not to mention similar unity among the limited number of species of living organisms on the planet) is remarkable and inexplicable by means of the evolutionary hypothesis. Assuming the evolutionary development of *homo sapiens* did not take place along one single line (as all evolutionary biologists do assume), then it becomes remarkable to the point of incredulity that multiple lines of arbitrary, incremental molecular evolution should produce *one* unitary specie known as Man. Delitzsch continues, “the assumption that this development has been repeated in parts of the earth most remote from each other, demands from us belief in a miracle of chance which is without parallel.”<sup>275</sup> Delitzsch puts it rather mildly, in fact. But he does touch upon the essential feature of evolutionary defense that cannot be touched: it is a system of faith, not of science.

For the evangelical, however, it is a system of faith that far surpasses ancient pagan idolatry in its destructive influence on biblical doctrine and the Christian faith. Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, in his excellent essay *On the Antiquity and the Unity of the Human Race*, addresses the theological importance of these two concepts pertaining to mankind. As to how long Man has been on the earth – the *antiquity* of the human race – Warfield fails to see much theological importance at all. He writes, “The question of the antiquity of man has of itself no theological significance.”<sup>276</sup> He does not believe that mankind’s tenure on the planet stretches back millions of years, as the evolutionist claims; but he also sees no validity in theologians attempting to calculate an exact duration of Man from the various chronologies presented in Scripture. How long Man has been here does not matter *theologically*. In other



**B. B. Warfield (1851-1921)**

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<sup>275</sup> Delitzsch; 302.

<sup>276</sup> Warfield, Benjamin B. *Studies in Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth; 1988); 235.

words, while it may indeed influence our interpretation of some passages of Scripture, it does not impact the doctrines of Creation and Redemption taught in the Bible.

The same cannot be said concerning the *unity* of the human race and its importance to theology. Warfield asserts that not only does Scripture everywhere assert the unity of the race, but also that the whole system of biblical revelation concerning the redemption of fallen man stands or falls upon this unity. “Throughout the Scriptures therefore all mankind is treated as, from the divine point of view, a unit, and shares not only in a common nature but in a common sinfulness, not only in a common need but in a common redemption.”<sup>277</sup> Thus Paul speaks philosophically in one place – albeit within the context of a sermon on redemption through faith in Jesus Christ – of the singular fountain of all peoples.

*...and [God] made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation...*  
(Acts 17:26)

This brief verse is, in fact, an inspired summary of the entirety of Genesis 10. Elsewhere the apostle speaks of the same concept, only much more theologically.

*Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned – for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.*  
(Romans 5:12-14)

Warfield comments, “The fact of racial sin is basal to the whole Pauline system, and beneath the fact of racial sin lies the fact of racial unity.”<sup>278</sup> This is a

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<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*; 257.

<sup>278</sup> *Idem.*

nonnegotiable to the evangelical, he cannot yield on the issue of the unity of the human race without fatally undermining the biblical doctrines of Original Sin and of redemption. Fortunately he is supported by both Science and Theology in maintaining – against the logic, if not the actual statements, of evolutionary thought – that mankind is one genetic whole: minor and insignificant variations within a specie rather than different species under a common genus. As we study this development of the human race stemming from one ‘new’ man – Noah – we see the biblical logic of redemptive history unfolding along three branches of one, unified race. This is a theological essential; loss of it would irreparably damage the rest of biblical revelation.

The unity of the human race is therefore made in Scripture not merely the basis of a demand that we shall recognize the dignity of humanity in all its representatives, of however lowly estate or family, since all bear alike the image of God in which man was created...but the basis also of the entire scheme of restoration devised by the divine love for the salvation of a lost race.<sup>279</sup>

*Now these are the records of the generations of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah; and sons were born to them after the flood.* (10:1)

This passage begins the *Toledoth beni-Noe* – the generations of the sons of Noah. Technically the pericope takes us to chapter 11, verse 9, with the conclusion of the narrative concerning the Tower of Babel. This is because the next *toledoth*, that of Shem, commences with verse 10 of that chapter. But the ‘Tower of Babel’ story is really a pericope of its own, with the current chapter little more than the prologue. Genesis 10 is not the type of chapter that lends itself to verse-by-verse exegesis, a comment that is more than validated by those commentaries that attempt to do this. The identities of the various members of the three branches of Noah’s descendants are anything but universally recognized, and each commentary waxes eloquent and verbose – with a preponderance of the latter in proportion to the former – concerning which

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<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*; 258.

modern people corresponds to each ancient tribe. With some of the names such identifications have been made easier through later biblical revelation as well as extra-biblical sources unearthed by archaeology. With most, however, their identification remains largely conjecture, as scholars attempt to find cognate names in various different languages that somehow trace back to the ones listed in Genesis 10. Here is a map that shows the general view concerning the various tribes listed in the *toledoth beni-Noe*.

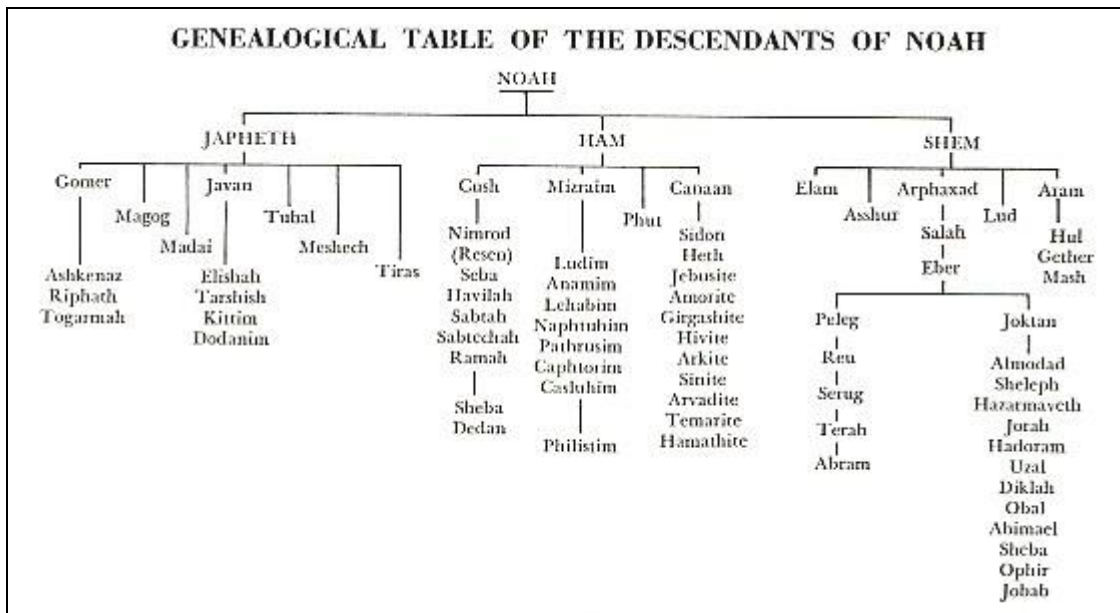


Due to the rampant conjecture with regard to exact identifications of the descendants of Noah's three sons, the approach we will take is to do a broad survey of the entire chapter, followed by three sections devoted to each of the three sons of Noah. The exception will be the singular narrative concerning Nimrod, nestled in the midst of the lineage of Ham, It is hoped that this hermeneutical approach will not only be less tedious than a verse-by-verse attempt to identify each name with a corresponding nation in either the ancient or (even more ridiculous) the modern world, but will also preserve the overarching *purpose* of the *toledoth*. This purpose is twofold - or perhaps better

stated, a unitary purpose that connects two different strands of biblical narrative. One the one hand, Chapter 10 elaborates on the previous passage in Chapter 9, where Moses leaves off during his parenthetical narrative of the sin and cursing of Ham,

*Now the sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem and Ham and Japheth; and Ham was the father of Canaan. These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the whole earth was populated.* (Genesis 9:18-19)

On the other hand, Chapter 10 serves as the backdrop and prelude to the more famous narrative concerning the Tower of Babel and the confusion of the languages, resulting in the separation of the various Noaic tribes and, eventually, the migratory population of the entire planet (which, of course, is the statement of Genesis 9:19). Thus the genealogies of Genesis 10 serve an important connecting role between the family of Noah as it begins anew after the Flood, and the providential separation of their descendants in preparation for the singular selection of Abram from among the tribe of Shem (Genesis 12).



**The Table of Nations**

One general comment to make at the beginning of this chapter is that the lists that follow are not so much a *genealogy* as they are an *ethnology*.<sup>280</sup> They are less a list of names – and probably not even a list of names – as they are a list of nations. The chapter is commonly known as the Table of Nations, and it is widely recognized by both Jewish and Christian scholars that this is not to be interpreted as an exhaustive enumeration of fathers and sons within the lineage of Japheth, Ham, and Shem. Rather these are the nations that flowed from the family that survived the Flood and ‘restarted’ the human race. Additionally, these are the nations that were familiar in the ancient world, particularly in the time in which Moses wrote.

Lending weight to the general observation that the lists of names under each postdiluvian patriarchal head – Japheth, Ham, and Shem – are not exhaustive is the familiar evidence of a formal pattern, at least in the overall scheme. John Sailhamer points out that there are a total of seventy tribes listed in Genesis 10, not including Nimrod who is not presented as a tribal head.<sup>281</sup> Many of the names listed in this chapter end in the characteristic ‘*im*’ of the Hebrew plural, indicating that what is in view in most, if not all, of the instances is the *tribe* or *nation* that either derived its name from its original progenitor, or lent its name to that historical source figure. Sailhamer points to the parallel between the seventy nations who emanate out from the ark to inhabit the world, and the seventy descendants of Jacob who enter Egypt under the protection of Joseph (Gen. 46:27). These two parallel groupings – one at the ‘beginning’ of the new earth after the Flood, and the other at the ‘end’ of the patriarchal period when Israel went down to Egypt, form an overarching *inclusion* for Moses, between which the world is both repopulated by a multitude of families, and narrowed down into one. The one family is chosen from the many, and the many families

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<sup>280</sup> The Greek word *ethnos* (ἔθνος) is literally translated ‘nation’ though it is often translated ‘Gentile’ in the English Bible. It is the root of the English words ‘ethnic’ and ‘ethnicity.’

<sup>281</sup> Sailhamer; 130.



are to be blessed through the one. “The author does not want the reader to lose sight of the unity among human beings.”<sup>282</sup>

Another significant characteristic of the Table of Nations is its complete lack of prejudice or racial hatred. No character analysis is offered for any of the nations listed – none are disparaged; none are praised – they are all simply listed. This is singular among all ancient narratives of the surrounding nations, as all others heavily emphasize the superiority of the nation from whose perspective the table is written. In contrast, the biblical table makes no attempt to single out the Israel nation (which, in fact, is not even listed), nor to bias the reader against any other particular nation (including, remarkably, the Canaanite). The worldwide scope – at least from the perspective of the postdiluvian world of the Ancient Near East – gives no anticipation of what is to come. Von Rad comments, “The line from primeval time does not lead lineally from Noah to Abraham, but it first opens into the universe of the international world.”<sup>283</sup>

This may seem to be an unremarkable observation, until one again considers the historical context in which the Book of Genesis – and with it the Table of Nations – was written and compiled. This was the Exodus, when the singular uniqueness of the nation of Israel was of greatest importance to Moses as he led this insignificant people into their new existence as a nation among nations. If ever there was a need for some degree of self-mythologizing narrative or of vitriolic prejudice against the land of their former bondage, Egypt, or of their future home, Canaan, this was that time. But the truth of the narrative is that “Israel looked at herself in the midst of the international world without illusion and quite unmythically.”<sup>284</sup>

A final introductory comment concerning the overall structure of the chapter, has to do with the order in which the sons of Noah are listed as to their ethnic heritage. This is of note simply because the normal order in which the

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<sup>282</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>283</sup> Von Rad; 145.

<sup>284</sup> *Idem.*

names of the three sons is invariably given - Shem, Ham, and Japheth - is not followed in the Table of Nations, which begins with Japheth, moves to Ham, and finishes with Shem. Ham continues to occupy the middle position, though it is evident from the previous narrative that he was Noah's youngest son. Perhaps Japheth is found at the head of the list because he is the oldest son, and because the list itself has no immediate bearing on either the Noaic Covenant or on the promised Seed of Woman. The only position that seems fairly clear is that of Shem, put last in the Table of Nations probably as the smoothest transition to the next *toledoth*, which is the *toledoth of Shem* (11:10).

### **The Ethnology of Japheth:**

Perhaps the nations that descend from Noah's son Japheth are treated first in order to, as it were, 'get them out of the way' before proceeding to those nations more intimately involved in the subsequent narrative of the call of Abraham and the development of the nation of Israel. Indeed, the Japhethites are the most difficult to identify with any confidence, and seem to be at a much greater remove from the original geographical fountain of postdiluvian migration: Mesopotamia. The text devotes only five verses to Japheth, though more sons of Japheth are named than of Ham or Shem. The author sums up the ethnology of Japheth by saying, "*From these the coastlands of the nations <sup>[e]</sup>were separated into their lands, every one according to his language, according to their families, into their nations.*"

This then becomes the biblical perspective of the Gentile world, almost universally associated with Japheth though it must also include the descendants of Ham (all who are not Semites). The 'coastlands' are the islands of the seas surrounding the Middle East and, by geographical circumlocution, the nations that lie beyond them. The term 'coastlands' becomes common in prophecy, especially that of Isaiah, with reference to the 'ends of the earth' - the farthest

reaches of the nations that will one day be touched by the Promised One, the Servant of Yahweh. Listen to the clear language of Genesis 10 found in Isaiah 66.

*For I know their works and their thoughts; the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and see My glory. I will set a sign among them and will send survivors from them to the nations: **Tarshish, Put, Lud, Meshech, Tubal and Javan**, to the distant coastlands that have neither heard My fame nor seen My glory. And they will declare My glory among the nations.* (Isaiah 66:18-19)

The prophets were guided in their visions by the words of Noah concerning his three sons: Japheth was indeed 'expanded' - his migrations took him the farthest across the globe. But it remained a central tenet of the biblical revelation of redemption that Japheth would 'dwell in the tents of Shem,' that the Gentile nations of the coastlands would experience the salvation wrought within the lineage of Japheth's brother, Shem. This was the general tenor of biblical prophecy as it pertained to the world beyond the borders of Israel, but it was not the exclusive right of Japheth to benefit redemptively through Shem. Mixed with the predominantly Japhetic names - Tarshish, Tubal, Meshech, and Javan - we also find in the Isaianic prophecy the Hamitic tribes of Put and Lud. As history thus far has confirmed, the Gospel of Jesus Christ has traveled far among the Japhetic tribes, but it has not entirely ignored the families of Ham.

Of the Japhethites two names are most familiar either to subsequent biblical narrative or extra-biblical sources. *Javan* is cognate to *Ionian*, which is widely recognized to be the foundational ethnicity of the Greeks. And *Tarshish* appears many other times in the Bible as well as other Ancient Near Eastern sources, and seems to indicate a region on the Mediterranean coast of Spain. Jewish tradition associates *Ashkenaz* with Germany, and the common modern denomination of 'Ashkenazi Jews' refers to Jewish immigrants to Israel from Germany and German-speaking enclaves of Central Europe. However, there is anything but universal agreement as to the identity of Ashkenaz. As to the other descendants of Japheth, the degree of confluence of opinion as to their

subsequent national identities is even less, with Gomer sometimes the ancestor of the Cimbri of Roman times and the Celts of Gaul and Britannia, and Madai typically related to the Medes. Of the others there is little more than pure conjecture in the commentaries, with almost no agreement. Thus it appears that the most important aspect of the 'lineage' of Japheth is that it did expand – to the periphery or coastlands and beyond – and subsequently returned as prophesied by Noah.

### **The Ethnology of Ham:**

Closer to 'home,' at least from the perspective of Moses, a Semite, are the ethnicities that derive from Noah's son Ham. These were to be the nations immediately surrounding the chosen line of the Seed, among whom the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would sojourn, and to whom the fledgling nation of Israel would be subject in bondage. The names of Ham's sons become common throughout the rest of the Old Testament, much more so than those of Japheth. Mitzraim – which is probably a tribal name rather than a personal name – is *Egypt*; Cush is *Ethiopia* as it pertained in the ancient world not only to the Upper Nile region but also the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula; Put or Phut is *Libya*, and, of course, Canaan is *Canaan*. Further down the line, Heth is the ancestor of the *Hittites*, whose empire was largely viewed as mythological until discovered in all its glory by archaeologists in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

What is significant about the lineage of Ham, and highlighted by the excursus on Nimrod, is the historical fact that the greatest of the ancient empires were Hamitic. "In the second millennium B.C. two great kingdoms especially determined the history of the Near East: Egypt in the south and the Hittites in the north."<sup>285</sup> We will see in the brief story of Nimrod that the ancient powerhouse of Babylon arose as well from the loins of Ham, through Cush. But

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<sup>285</sup> Von Rad; 140.

one of the more intriguing of the descendants of Ham, and of the ancient empires, is that of China.

China seems to be entirely ignored by the biblical record, a fact often pointed to by unbelievers and scoffers to show that the Bible is historically inaccurate and irrelevant. While it is true that the details of every single nation is well beyond the scope and purpose of biblical revelation, does it seem reasonable that such a significant ancient empire as that of China should pass entirely without notice? Well perhaps it does not, for in the lineage of Ham there are the *Sinites* who are often viewed as the original inhabitants of the Sinai Peninsula, but who are more likely to be the progenitors of the Chinese. 'Sinites' is the English translation of *Sinim*, which is the plural of *Sin* who was probably a descendant of Ham through Canaan (*cp.* Gen. 10:16-17). Chinese tradition speaks frequently of the origination of the nation through a *Siang-Fu*, or 'Father Sin,' who migrated to the Central Kingdom from the northwest. "The Chinese have a tradition that their first king, Fu-hi, made his appearance on the Mountains of Chin immediately after the world had been covered with water."<sup>286</sup> This would, incidentally, be the most obvious and logical route into the land of China from the Near East, as the traveler would travel north to circumvent the Hindu Kush and Himalayan Mountain ranges, arriving in the arid regions of Central Asia, and then travel southeast into the more fertile lands of what is modern-day China.

It may be coincidence, and the vast span of time would almost guarantee that it is so, but the term *Sino* has long been a prefix referring to China, as in the *Sino-Japanese War*, or *Sino-American relations*. What cannot be a coincidence is the undeniable skull similarity between the inhabitants of China (Mongoloid) and those of Africa (Negroid), as well as with the inhabitants of North and South America (Indian). It is apparent that paths of migration for the earliest settlers of

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<sup>286</sup> Custance; *Noah's Three Sons*; 106.

the Americas came through the lands of China, and anatomical similarities relate these peoples to the earliest inhabitants of the continent of Africa as well.

Further confirming a relationship between the settlers of China and those



**Artist's Rendering of the Ziggurat of Ur**

of Mesopotamia and Egypt – the descendants of Ham – are the appearance of *ziggurats* or step pyramids throughout these regions, and nowhere else. This architectural phenomenon will be the focus of the opening verses of Chapter 11, which is presaged by the story of Nimrod here in Chapter 10. What is germane

to the discussion of the origins of the ancient Chinese culture and empire is the fact that the appearance of these and similar structures is limited to lands apparently settled by the descendants of Ham. Pyramids are, of course, commonly associated with Egypt – or Mizraim, the son of Ham. But the largest pyramid – an earthen step pyramid – is found in China, the Pyramid of Xi'an. Step pyramids are also found as central features in the ancient Amerindian cultures of the Aztecs and the Incas. In each place where they are found, they are also surmised to have been either places of worship and/or burial mausoleums for the mighty and noble of the society. Thus when these strands of corroborating data are tied together, it is not unreasonable to conclude that the Chinese culture descended from Ham, perhaps through a grandson named Sin.

#### **A Mighty Hunter Before the Lord:**

Tucked in the midst of the ethnology of Ham we find the short narrative of Nimrod, in a manner that seems a bit incongruous until one reflects on the overall pattern of the Genesis narrative thus far. “In the midst of this barren enumeration of names and affinities, a person full of life and action and human

passion appears, who would be a notable figure in the picture of any age, but who stands out in sharper relief against the unembellished background."<sup>287</sup>

*Now Cush became the father of Nimrod; he became a mighty one on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the LORD." The beginning of his kingdom was Babel and Erech and Accad and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. From that land he went forth into Assyria, and built Nineveh and Rehoboth-Ir and Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city.*  
(10:8-12)

We need not interpret the genealogy of Nimrod literally, that he was the grandson of Ham and great-grandson of Noah. The word 'father' is quite elastic in the biblical record, and often means little more than lineal descent. Though it may be that there was a direct line from Noah to Ham to Cush to Nimrod, the essence of the text is that Nimrod was a Cushite, a tribe usually associated with southern Arabia and Ethiopia. This is significant in that the lands mentioned with regard to Nimrod are nowhere near southern Arabia or Ethiopia.

The narrative about Nimrod stresses his prowess on the hunt, which probably set him apart as a man to be admired and feared. Though his 'hunting' was ostensibly that of animals, the immediate application of this vocation or hobby is the establishing of mighty cities. The two do not seem to follow logically on one another. To this we add the phrase "*before the Lord*," which interestingly is *Jehovah* and not *Elohim*, and we frankly have a rather difficult passage to exegete. Commentators have generally concluded that Nimrod was a hunter of men, in a very negative, tyrannical way, but the text does not indicate that. It appears that we have a truncated tradition concerning a 'hero' of the immediate postdiluvian world – a hero at least in the sense of worldly man.

This story's insertion to the ethnology of Genesis 10 would make little sense unless it were a parallel to another similar insertion found earlier: that of Lamech in Genesis 4. The significance of Lamech's Sword Song was to show the degeneracy of the lineage of Cain – the violence and worldliness of the Cainites.

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<sup>287</sup> Davis, *Genesis and Semitic Tradition*; 135.

The significance of the story of Nimrod here is to do the same for the ethnology of Ham, the cursed son of Noah. Nimrod represents the beginning of world political empire, which history confirms occurred among the Hamitic peoples of Egypt and Mesopotamia (and China). This narrative seems to belie the curse – that Ham’s descendants would be the servant of servants to his brothers Shem and Japheth – by placing world dominion first within the descendants of Ham. However, when one views the matter through the lens of Scripture and of faith (*cp.* especially Hebrews 11), one realizes that the Hamite kingdoms were, in fact, manifestations of the utter worldliness of the Hamitic line.

That Nimrod performed his exploits *before the Lord* cannot be interpreted as divine approbation, but rather that Nimrod defiantly exercised tyrannical dominion over his fellow men *in the face of the Lord*. The contrast that is found everywhere in Scripture, between that which man values and that which God values, must be allowed to influence our exegesis of this otherwise very difficult passage. “Thus we see, from the beginning, that things which are highly esteemed among men are held in abomination with God.”<sup>288</sup> The earliest empires of human history were built in the land between the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers – literally *Mesopotamia*: the Sumerian, the Babylonian, the Assyrian – with the two great metropolitan areas of the Ancient Near East – Babylon and Ninevah – as their centers. Here we have the history of that, humanly-speaking, auspicious beginning of the might of man in the person of Ninevah.

The character of Nimrod, as also the character of Noah, is found in most of the ancient myths and annals of the Middle East. Some commentators believe Nimrod is the biblical equivalent to Gilgamesh, others that he is the ancient figure who inspired the pagan worship of Ba’al. In any event, his position in the current narrative is both historical and representative, just as Lamech’s was in the lineage of Cain. The Flood did not eradicate the sin in Man’s heart, nor were each of the sons of Noah destined to follow in their father’s faith. Thus the old

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<sup>288</sup> Fuller; 44.



pattern of worldliness represented before the Flood by Lamech, is repeated after the Flood in Nimrod. Alfred Edersheim comments, "Altogether this 'mighty one in the earth,' who founded the first world-empire, reminds us of Cain and of his descendant Lamech."<sup>289</sup>

### **The Ethnology of Shem:**

Genesis 10 closes with the ethnology of Shem. There is not much that can be said of the names given in these verses, as their individual ethnic lines have been lost to history. The opening comment, that Shem was '*father of all the children of Eber*' seems to indicate that Eber was a notable character in the ancient world – perhaps the progenitor of the Hebrews, though that is mostly conjecture and a little etymological manipulation of the name. This is the ancestry of Abraham, but nothing is said of the earlier members of Abraham's family here. That will be taken up in the next chapter, in the next *toledoth*, so this particular recounting of the family of Shem is very brief and unembellished.

We have already had occasion to note the one significant deviation from the ethnological pattern – the mention of Peleg and the separation of the earth during his days. This is, of course, generally believed to be the timing of the confusion of the languages at the Tower of Babel, which is the next pericope within this particular *toledoth*. It was argued that this could also have been the time when the continents, perhaps weakened as to their adhesion by the forces unleashed during the Flood, finally separated into what we now know as the seven continents of the globe. The two options are by no means exclusive: God could very well have initiated the political and social separation of mankind through the confusion of human language, and followed with a geographical division of the tribes of men by means of tectonic plate action.

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<sup>289</sup> Edersheim; 42.

*These are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, by their nations; and out of these the nations were separated on the earth after the flood.* (10:32)

This passage is both a summary of what has just passed and a prelude to the mini-narrative of the Tower of Babel that is to follow. Again, no other children are assigned to Noah; all of mankind after the devastating Flood will trace their heritage to the faithful patriarch through one of his three sons, Shem, Ham, or Japheth.

This chapter is not only of great historical interest and value, but bears directly on the purpose of the sacred history; for it not only affiliates the people of the various nations as the common descendants of Noah, and consequently of Adam, but shows that, while a temporary separation was to be made of the Jews, that peculiar dispensation was to be subservient to a grand scheme of providence for diffusing the knowledge of divine grace and salvation among all mankind.<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown; 121.

**Week 14: The City of Man****Text Reading: Genesis 11:1 - 9**

*“For the good make use of the world in order to enjoy God,  
whereas the evil want to make use of God in order to enjoy the world.”*  
(Augustine)

On August 24<sup>th</sup> AD 410, the unthinkable happened. The Eternal City, Rome, was captured and plundered by the Germanic Visigoths, led by their indomitable king, Alaric. For over eight hundred years the city had remained inviolate – even the resourceful Carthaginian general Hannibal was unable to conquer the city of Rome – and was widely considered to be impregnable. Although Rome had long ceased to be the center of imperial power, Alaric’s penetration of the city’s walls, and the subsequent looting, rapine, and wanton destruction, shook the confidence of the population of the Empire to its core.<sup>291</sup> The aftermath of the catastrophe brought out many apologists who sought to explain the debacle. Notable among them were the neo-pagans, who asserted that it was Rome’s abandonment of her gods in favor of the Christian Christ, that led to the destruction of the Eternal City.



**Augustine of Hippo (354-430)** in writing, and the first edition of *De Civitate Dei* was not published until AD 426, over fifteen years after the Sack of Rome. The book is a tome, running to almost 1,100 pages in the mass paperback version in English,

<sup>291</sup> It should be noted, however, that Alaric did spare many churches from destruction, and protected any who sought refuge in those churches. Alaric was an interesting character in this early post-Roman world: a ‘barbarian’ Goth who had professed allegiance to both Christianity and the Roman Emperor.

and has been translated and republished continuously since its original issue. It is the classic work in Christian apologetics and 'worldview,' and standard reading in Medieval history courses, history of religion courses, and, of course, Christian history and theology curricula.

In *De Civitate Dei* Augustine sets forth what has become the classical Christian worldview or perspective of the 'two cities' of the world: the *City of Man* represented by Rome, and the *City of God* represented by the Christian Church. Augustine's work is thus the original *Tale of Two Cities*, the enduring nature of each being far more profound than that of either 18<sup>th</sup> Century Paris or its rival, London. In *De Civitate Dei* Augustine makes very clear that the generational identity of the *City of Man* will change - in his own day the former was represented by the city of Rome. But the identity of the *City of God* remains constant throughout the ages, for it is the Church of God purchased by Christ's blood from every tongue, tribe, and nation in each generation. When one reads Augustine's work, however, it becomes apparent that a very much shorter version of the worldview of this great Latin Father was penned almost two thousand years earlier by Moses: the story of the Tower of Babel.

The city of Babylon, founded by Nimrod and built upon the Tower by which Man was to "*make a name for himself*," is the original *City of Man*, whose pattern would be repeated countless times throughout subsequent human history, and continues to be repeated in the modern era. Augustine summarizes the attitude that undergirds the founding of each *City of Man*, and contrasts it with the spirit of the abiding *City of God* in each age. "We see then that the two cities were created by two kinds of love: the earthly city was created by self-love reaching the point of contempt for God, the Heavenly City by the love of God carried as far as contempt of self."<sup>292</sup> In Book IV, Chapter 6 Augustine relates the account of a Greek historian, Justinus, who speaks of the development of imperial power as being a perversion of the 'normal' and 'just' role of kings. The

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<sup>292</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*; Book XIV; Chapter 28.

passage is clearly suggestive of the narrative of Nimrod the Cushite, related in Genesis 10,

At the beginning of history the supreme power over races and nations rested with kings, who rose to that summit of authority not by canvassing popular support, but because their moderation was recognized by good men. The peoples were not under the restraint of laws; it was their custom to protect, not to extend, the frontiers of their dominions, and their realms were confined within the limits of their own country. Ninus, king of Assyria, was the first to change these ancient and, as it were, hereditary customs, through a craving for empire, which was then a novelty. He was the first to make war on his neighbours and he extended his sway as far as the borders of Libya, over nations who were not trained to resist.<sup>293</sup>

Though we have no indication from Scripture that Nimrod extended his imperial sway as far as Libya, yet the similarity between 'Ninus' and 'Nimrod' is too obvious to miss. It is significant, therefore, that the narrative of the Tower of Babel is set geographically in the same land as the rise of the Nimrodian Empire. The oppressive and unreasonable desire of man for dominion over his fellow man has ever been the root cause of each 'building' of the Tower of Babel, and each founding of the 'City of Man,' with Nimrod's Babylon being merely the first of a long line. Given the context of the sack of one of the temporal manifestations of the *City of Man* – Rome – Augustine sets out to describe the history, as it were, of the conflict between the human edifice and the timeless, spiritual *City of God*.

My task is to discuss, to the best of my power, the rise, the development and the destined ends of the two cities, the earthly and the heavenly, the cities which we find, as I have said, interwoven, as it were, in this present transitory world, and mingled with one another.<sup>294</sup>

Augustine describes the founders and the citizens of the earthly city as being 'natural,' and as responding naturally to their fallen and clouded

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<sup>293</sup> Quoted in Augustine, *City of God*; Book IV, Chapter 6.

<sup>294</sup> Augustine, XI.1.

understandings. The City of God, he asserts, is founded and populated solely upon the principle of *grace*. “But the citizens of the earthly city are produced by a nature which is vitiated by sin, while the citizens of the Heavenly City are brought forth by grace, which sets nature free from sin. The former are called ‘vessels of wrath,’ the latter ‘vessels of mercy.’”<sup>295</sup>

To Augustine the fall of Rome was neither catastrophic nor unexpected. Reading history through the lens of Scripture, and undoubtedly considering the fate of the earliest *City of Man*, Babylon, the theologian was assured that the duration of any earthly kingdom or empire was limited. The seeds of destruction are sown in the foundation of the *City of Man*,

It [i.e., the *City of Man*] has its good in this world, and rejoices to participate in it with such gladness as can be derived from things of such a kind. And since this is not the kind of good that causes no frustrations to those enamoured of it, the earthly city is generally divided against itself by litigations, by wars, by battles, by the pursuit of victories that bring death with them or at best are doomed to death...For it will not be able to lord it permanently over those whom it has been able to subdue victoriously.<sup>296</sup>

In the end, Augustine does not entirely condemn the *City of Man*, leaving that to God in the final judgment. He recognizes that the two cities are intertwined in this life, and that many who are citizens of the *City of God* are, in this life, also citizens of the earthly city. The benefits that attach to each city accrue to the believer as well as the unbeliever, and the oppressions and misery that belong to the *City of Man* are suffered as well by the believer as by the unbeliever. “Nevertheless, both cities alike enjoy the good things, or are afflicted with the adversities of this temporal state, but with a different faith, a different expectation, a different love, until they are separated by the final judgment, and each receives her own end, of which there is no end.”<sup>297</sup> In *De Civitate Dei*,

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<sup>295</sup> Augustine, XV.2.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.* XV.4.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.* XVIII.54.

Augustine provides an excellent commentary not only on the various cities of Man that have cropped up over the ages, but upon the first such edifice to human glory, Babylon. Though God scattered the men who built that city and its tower, the same men took with them the same inordinate desire for self-gratification and self-glorification. Thus the children of God in every age have had to deal with their 'Babylon,' their *City of Man*, while in every age "*looking for a city whose Builder and Maker is God.*"

*Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words.* (11:1)

An initial comment should be made concerning the narrative of the Tower of Babel and the confusion of the languages, in light of what we have just read in Chapter 10, the Table of Nations. The narrative recorded in Chapter 11 cannot be consecutive in time to the genealogies/ethnologies recorded in Chapter 10, for in several places in the earlier chapter we read the summary statement,

*From these the coastlands of the nations were separated into their lands, every one according to his language, according to their families, into their nations.*

(10:5, 20, 31)

It is therefore evident that Genesis 11:1-9 is a recapitulation of an event, fitting somewhere within the ethnological records of Genesis 10. Most scholars place the confusion of the languages during the life of Peleg, per Genesis 10:25, and this is entirely possible. Nor does this preclude that the land was physically separated during the same era, as God may very well have caused the well-attested plate tectonic activity to hasten the separation within mankind initiated by the confusion of languages. The main problem facing an early date for the Tower/Confusion episode (Peleg was the fifth generation from Noah) is the comprehensive statement found in Genesis 11:1, "*Now the whole earth used the same language...*" The tone of the narrative in Genesis 11 is of a fairly large population covering a rather wide area - or at least tending toward dispersion over a wide area.

There are two ways that the population growth issue can be viewed, each of which is supported by the general characteristic of the Old Testament text. The first is that the lineage given in Genesis 10 is not complete. We have already noted John Sailhamer's contention regarding the similarity between the seventy 'nations' in Genesis Chapter 10 and the seventy descendants of Jacob who travel down to Egypt during the famine (*see page 223*). If this analysis, or others very similar, are accepted, then the ethnological lists are typical and representative only, and need not be considered as generationally exhaustive. Further supporting this view is the clear emphasis which Moses gives to certain names, in particular Canaan and Eber. The former, of course, represents the land that was promised to the descendants of Abraham, and the people who, under Moses and Joshua, would be displaced before the invading Israelites. The latter, Eber, is the progenitor of the *Hebrews*, or at least that is the conventional wisdom concerning this lineage, of which the Israelites were the most biblically notable members. If the ethnologies of Genesis 10 are typical and representative, then other 'generations' may have existed within the given list, and thus the world's population may have been substantially larger in the days of Peleg.

A second view holds that the term *the whole world* is not to be interpreted extensively, but intensively. Rather than indicating a great mass of humanity, the phrase could simply be emphasizing that *every man* in the world had the same language as *every other man*. This view is perhaps preferable to the extensive interpretation, for the narrative goes on to implicate *the whole world* in the offense of Babel. This would, of course, also implicate Noah and the Semitic line through which the Promised Seed was to be preserved. Given the Nimrod Narrative of the previous chapter, it is probably best to see the events of Genesis 11:1-9 as not extending to the involvement of every man on the earth, and perhaps not extending beyond a large segment of the Hamitic people dwelling in the region of Babylon. This interpretation also allows for the simple conclusion



that there was but one language in the earth at that time, without attempting to tackle the unanswerable question as to just how populous the earth was.

Is the contention that the human race at one time spoke the same language rational and reasonable? In spite of the general criticism that such a view has received from modern anthropological studies, there is an *a priori* argument that strongly supports an original, primeval, and single human language. This is based on the vast array of similarities that exist between all races of mankind, throughout all ages, as discussed in the last lesson. It is undeniable even by evolutionary scientists, that Man is a unity; it stands to reason that mankind descended from common stock, and consequently at one time possessed one language.

Arthur Custance devotes a lengthy chapter in his Doorway Paper series, *Time and Eternity*, to the issue of an original unity of the human language. He quotes frequently from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century German philologist who, though an atheist who disparaged the Bible every chance he got, nonetheless considered the evidence of an original, unified human language to be far too strong to



**Max Muller (1823-1900)**

deny. Muller expended great effort in his two volume opus magnum, *The Science of Language*, to show that underlying similarities in grammatical forms between otherwise very diverse linguistic families argues strongly in favor of an original, unified human language. Another interesting feature of Muller's writings is his usage of Semitic and Hamitic to describe two of the three linguistic families he believed to populate the world, the other being the Aryan or Indo-European (which we would call Japhetic).

The question naturally arises: if there was once just one language among all mankind, what language was it? This is a purely speculative question, not admitting of anything more than a speculative answer. Augustine famously declared the original language to be Hebrew, the language of the ethnicity of

Eber.<sup>298</sup> But this is exegetically illogical, as Eber was a fair distance removed from Noah; why should the language of this ethnicity be viewed as the original? Augustine's argument – again mere speculation – is that from the confusion of the languages one language was preserved in its original form, that being the language of the Scriptures, Hebrew. Again, the logic is faulty, for Greek is equally a language of Scripture, and no one wishes to put forward Greek as the original human language. However, the notion that Hebrew, or perhaps Aramaic, was the original language, retains steady support among evangelical scholars throughout the recent era. Custance, in the same work referenced above, devotes another chapter to *The Original Speech of Mankind*. In this chapter he does not come down decisively in favor of Hebrew as the original tongue, but does argue fervently that the original language was *Semite*, the parent tribe of Eber.

*It came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. They said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly." And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar. They said, "Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."* (11:2-4)

Here, from the human point of view, is the crux of the narrative: the desire among men to remain cohesive rather than to be scattered, and have their strength diluted through geographical dispersion. The underlying motivation is twofold: *fear* and *pride*. The building of a city has throughout human history been seen as an attempt to join forces, as it were, against the onslaught of Nature and of human enemies. Leon Kass writes, "The city – every city – is a thoroughly human institution, with settled place and defined boundaries, whose internal plan and visible structures all manifest the presence of human reason and artfulness. The city affirms man's effort to provide for his own safety and needs,

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<sup>298</sup> *City of God*; XVI.11.

strictly on his own.”<sup>299</sup> Kass recognizes that the narrative of Babel is, as noted in our introductory remarks above, the quintessential, paradigmatic city of Man, the inherent desire in the heart of fallen man not to be overwhelmed by the vastness of Creation, now hostile to him due to his own sin. “Babel, the universal city, is the fulfillment of a recurring human dream, a dream of humankind united, living together in peace and freedom, no longer at the mercy of an inhospitable or hostile nature, and enjoying a life no longer solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”<sup>300</sup> Later, he adds, “when men come face-to-face with hostile nature or hostile men in a state of nature, the city appears as a remedy and the universal city a dream of deliverance, peace, and prosperity.”<sup>301</sup> But the common testimony of human history is that, with regard to the ‘City of Man’ in every age, the dream turns into a nightmare.

Fear is a powerful motive force, but pride undoubtedly plays a strong part in the rise and development of the ‘city,’ for there are always a few individuals within the mass of mankind who drive the rest toward their own goals. The perennial cry of all city-builders is “*Let us make a name for ourselves!*” This facet of the narrative in Genesis 11 is represented by the tower. This was the ziggurat, the step-pyramid that would become commonplace among the Hamitic migration from Egypt across Mesopotamia, through China and into the Americas. It is universally agreed that these structures were oriented toward the heavens, and often were situated in alignment with celestial objects.<sup>302</sup> “The tower, part of the city’s temple, is a human effort to link up heaven and earth.”<sup>303</sup> These edifices would often be the center of the tribal religion, and served the purposes of the ancient astronomers of Mesopotamia, who are praised to this day for their discoveries and analyses of the heavens. Paganism was indeed ignorant of the true God, but that does not mean it was ignorant.

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<sup>299</sup> Kass; 227.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*; 219.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*; 232.

<sup>302</sup> The three Pyramids of Cheops are not aligned linearly, rather they mimic the stars of Orion’s belt.

<sup>303</sup> Kass; 229.

But the attempted linkage between heaven and earth was not to be praised, for it was no less than the continuation of the satanic temptation, "*You shall be as God...*" One such ancient Babylonian ziggurat was named 'The House of the Foundation of Heaven and Earth,' and of this Kass writes, "The House...thus sought to link the city with the cosmos, and to bring the city into line with the heavenly powers that be, or - perhaps, conversely - to bring the powers that be into line with the goals of the city."<sup>304</sup> The ziggurat thus represents the essence of paganism, the attempt by man to manipulate the gods (or god, or the heavens) to serve his purposes. There is the unmitigated pride of fallen man. "They were symbolic structures, representing the mountain on which the gods were supposed to dwell; and those who erected them sought by so doing to obtain the favor of the divinities to whom they were dedicated. At the same time they gratified human pride."<sup>305</sup> Fear and pride. Fear to drive man away from God and toward one another in the perceived security of numbers, the City. And pride, to exalt Man to heaven through his own artifice and skill. The Tower of Babel was constructed many thousands of years ago; but Man has not changed.

Another word should be said concerning the 'city' in order to attempt to understand God's reaction to what the men of Shinar were attempting. Overall, the Bible is not favorable to cities. From Genesis 4, where the building of a city is the first act recorded of exiled Cain, to the Book of Revelation, where Babylon the whore features throughout as the epitome of human wickedness and rebellion, the Bible nowhere exalts a city as the paragon of sanctity and virtue. There are Sodom and Gomorrah, and Ninevah, and even Jerusalem, "*who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her.*"<sup>306</sup> The Babel narrative is perhaps the most powerful paradigm yet encountered in these opening chapters of Genesis, for it represents the visible height of human hubris: the City of Man. But the believer

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<sup>304</sup> Kass; 229.

<sup>305</sup> Mitchell, H. G. *The World Before Abraham*; 267.

<sup>306</sup> Matthew 23:37.

ought to recognize the biblical antipathy toward the city, and realize that the uniformity that occurs in a city is contrary to the human spirit as it is supposed to be, seeking its freedom and its security in God alone. Kass writes, "Through technology, through division of labor, through new modes of interdependence and rule, and through laws, customs, and mores, the city radically transforms its inhabitants."<sup>307</sup> But this uniformity and conformity is a type of cave-dwelling, according to Socrates, and leads to a form of isolation and spiritual death. Kass concludes, "The self-sufficient and independent city of man means full estrangement and spiritual death for all its inhabitants."<sup>308</sup> Not a pretty picture, but the starkness between the City of Man and the City of God is meant to be noticed, at least by believers.

*The LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. The LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them. (11:5-6)*

The divine response is reminiscent of the similar response to the sin of Adam and Eve, when God cast the first pair out of the Garden "lest he stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever." Thus there is grace in what God does in response to the building of the city and tower of Babel, just as there was grace in His casting Adam and Eve out of Eden. It is the case that divine providential punishment – in all sorts of forms involving individuals and especially nations – is a means whereby Man (and the earth on which he dwells) is protected from himself. What God is saying here in response to the Babel incident is, that since man's heart is only evil from his youth, the fact that he can so easily communicate among himself – one common language – facilitates and accelerates the sin that this heart-wickedness produces.

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<sup>307</sup> Kass; 231.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*; 236.

John Calvin sees a ‘suppressed irony’ in the Lord’s words here, “as if God would propose to himself a difficult work in subduing their audacity.”<sup>309</sup> Indeed, it is true that while the nations rage and the kings of the earth plot vain things, He who sits in the heavens laughs;<sup>310</sup> nonetheless the divine dialogue here recorded gives no hint of irony. God is not the least concerned that Man will become too powerful for Him to control. Rather He is exhibiting concern that Man might grow so powerful in sin as to render himself irredeemable. The building of Babel and its tower was a step down the same path that led to the Flood, as are all attempts toward world domination, one-world governments, ‘leagues of nations’ or United Nations. “A humanity that thinks only of its own confederation is at liberty for anything, i.e., for every extravagance. Therefore God resolves upon a punitive, but at the same time preventative, act, so that he will not have to punish man more severely as his degeneration surely progresses.”<sup>311</sup> The ‘solution’ God imposes on the situation worked at the time, and continues to work today: “*Let us confuse their language.*”

*Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another’s speech.* (11:7)

It would be a shallow exegesis to conclude that the mere changing of vocalization of words was what is intended here. Language has long been understood to be much more than that, and as representative as much of *thought* as of speech. The verse seems to repeat the punishment: mentioning language in the first clause, and speech in the second. This, of course, is patterned after verse 1 of the chapter, where it is asserted that mankind at that time “*used the same language and the same words.*” But the key to this remediation/punishment is not merely in the altering of patterns of speech, but is far deeper: in the understanding, literally, “*the lips of his associate.*” This touches upon the fact that

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<sup>309</sup> Calvin; 330.

<sup>310</sup> Psalm 2:1-4

<sup>311</sup> Von Rad; 149.

language is far more than different modes of air passing over vocal cords; it represents the underlying thought patterns and worldviews of a people. “This means more than sharing uniform sounds and symbols – speaking, say, Aramaic rather than Greek; it means sharing the view of the world embedded in a language.”<sup>312</sup> There is a greater difference between a Frenchman and a German than his language, as is true between any people of different tongue. God did not merely alter the various languages of the ethnicities outlined in Chapter 10; in changing their languages He altered their patterns of thought.

This is an important concept to grasp, for it alone explains why the advent of translators has not brought about the unified world that men still seek. In a poor imitation of the day of Pentecost, ambassadors from scores of nations sit in the General Assembly of the United Nations and ‘hear’ the words of the speaker is at the podium, from whatever nation he or she may be, in their own language. This is the artifice of translators. Yet the illusory goal of world unity remains beyond their reach. This is because language, in its truest sense, cannot be translated until the person *thinks* in the same pattern as the people whose language he is attempting to learn. Languages are ‘constructed’ by life, and different languages reflect different patterns or processes of thought that are themselves products of a people’s own history. “Language therefore conveys less the world as it is than it does the self-interested and humanly constructed vision of that world.”<sup>313</sup> The divergence in human languages represents a more significant divergence in human *worldviews*, and no mere translator between two languages can bridge this gap.

The scattering of mankind as a result of the confusion of the languages also contains an important soteriological aspect; one might say, a prophetic aspect. Just as a single unified language endangered mankind as an intensification of the wickedness of the human heart, so also the vast diversity of

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<sup>312</sup> Kass; 223.

<sup>313</sup> *Idem.*

language renders a great percentage of the human race deaf to the special revelation of God, the Word of salvation. This was, of course, the divine intention, as we read in Acts 14, where Paul speaks to the citizens of Lystra in terms clearly reminiscent of the Noaic Covenant and of the scattering of the nations at Babel.

*We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, WHO MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM. **In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways;** and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.* (Acts 14:15-17)

The divine self-disclosure through the special revelation of Scripture, was not given in a universal language so that all men could read and understand. Rather it was given in Hebrew and, later, in Greek. The latter, the language of the New Testament, approached as nearly to a universal language in the first century as any language had since all men had the same tongue. But Hebrew was by no means universal, and the initial and foundational self-disclosure of God was thereby severely restricted in its extension throughout the human race. The nations *went their own ways*, with only the witness of Creation rendering them without excuse, but offering them no knowledge or hope of salvation.

The converse of this is, of course, the miracle of language on the day of the first Christian Pentecost, a miracle as much of hearing as of speech.

*They were amazed and astonished, saying, "Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs – we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God."* (Acts 2:7-11)



The events of that first Pentecost are meaningful on a number of perspectives, not the least of which is the powerful reversal of the scattering of the nations via the confusion of tongues. Here we have the brining together of nations under the preaching of the Gospel, all either in a common tongue or at least heard *and understood* by each member of the audience *in their own tongue*. From these events – comparing Genesis 11 with Acts 2 – it is quite reasonable to conclude that there will be but one language in the New Earth, when the redeemed of mankind will both hear and speak of the ‘mighty deeds of God’ in one universally understood tongue.

*So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of the whole earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth. (11:8-9)*

The *toledoth beni-Noe* ends with the closing of the Babel Narrative, which itself ends, in a manner of speaking, right where it began. Men gathered together and devised a plan so that they might not be ‘*scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.*’ God, in His sublime judgment, gives them exactly what they sought to avoid, He ‘*scatters them abroad over the face of the whole earth.*’ To borrow from the patriarch Job, that which men feared indeed came upon them.<sup>314</sup> But the manner by which God effected this judgment, once again, speaks of the grace of God in preserving Man from himself, and the faithfulness of God in providentially securing a world future that would not require another deluge to purge it from human sin. God destroyed the unity of language; He did not destroy the buildings of the city or the tower that was the citadel of their pride.

The paradigmatic nature of the Babel/Tower Narrative is manifest in even the most cursory reading of human history. Man from the days of Peleg to the current time, has attempted to build the City of Man – the ‘world-city’ as Delitzsch calls it. It seems to be a common feature of the abiding character of

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<sup>314</sup> Job 3:25.

God's initial response to this trend, to leave the cities intact while scattering the builders. Indeed, some of the most notorious of the ancient world-cities are gone without a trace: Ninevah, Babylon, Thebes. But others remain: Rome, in spite of additional rampages in the decades after Alaric; also Samarkand, Paris, Berlin, and London. Once capitals of great empires that aspired to world dominance, these are now just cities without even the shadow of their former influence. No doubt they are providentially preserved as reminders to all who are seeking that city "*whose Builder and Maker is God,*" of that same lesson taught by the narrative in Genesis 11.

The sequel will show that the division of mankind over the face of the whole earth was not uniformly applied across the descendants of the three sons of Noah. Ham and Japheth migrated great distances over the ensuing generations; Shem stayed remarkably close to home. It is to the *toledoth* of this that this pre-Abrahamic section of Genesis now turns, and concludes.

**Week 15: The Rise & Progress of Sin****Text Reading: Genesis 11:10 - 26**

*“Perhaps we should pay attention to the plan He adopted  
as the alternative to Babel.  
We are ready to take a walk with Abram.”  
(Leon Kass)*

The pre-Abrahamic primal history closes in Genesis 11 somewhat anticlimactically, with another, short *toledoth*. This one is of Shem, the covenant-blessed son of Noah and ancestor of Abram/Abraham. The text of the *toledoth* of Shem is as non-descript as the other genealogies, and commentators are so perplexed for something to say regarding this portion of Scripture, that one even conjectures that perhaps Shem was, in fact, Melchizedek. That is indeed an interesting thought, with no substantiation in the biblical record. Luther, admitting the relative insignificance of this passage, attempts to instill importance into the *toledoth* of Shem by elevating the lives of the men named to a degree of piety perhaps a bit higher than they actually attained. He writes,

This last part of the eleventh chapter of Genesis does not seem to contain anything of special importance, for it tells us only of the generations of the patriarchs. But this narrative is indeed very necessary. We greatly need, especially in our time, such examples...This, then, is the chief lesson of the story of the generations of the pious that God never forsakes His Church, though at one time it is stronger than at others.<sup>315</sup>

It is undoubtedly true that God preserves His remnant in all ages, even the most impious. But were the generations of Shem godly men? We do not have here a member of the lineage of Shem to correspond with Enoch of Seth, “*who walked with God and was no more, for God took him.*” Nor does the lineage of Shem end with a Noah, the only other of whom it is written that he “*walked with God.*”

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<sup>315</sup> Luther; 197-198.

Indeed, it appears that there were none in the generation of Terah who followed after Jehovah, as we are reminded by Joshua.

*Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'From ancient times your fathers lived beyond the River, namely, Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods...'"* (Joshua 24:2)

Therefore, though there will be a few technical exegetical comments to be made with regard to the Semitic genealogy, the *toldeoth* of Shem serves primarily as a transition from the narrative portion of Genesis of which Noah is the leading figure, to that in which Abraham becomes the central character. The nature of the passage as summary and introduction is further validated by the structure of the genealogy of Shem recorded here. There are ten generations from Noah to Terah, just as there were ten generations from Adam to Noah in Chapter 5. It cannot be determined from the text whether the number 'ten' is purely stylistic, or whether providentially God ordained that there would be exactly ten generations between these markers.

<u>Genesis 5f</u>		<u>Genesis 11:10f</u>
Adam	1	Noah
Seth	2	Shem
Enosh	3	Arpachshad
Kenan	4	Shelah
Mahalalel	5	Eber
Jared	6	Peleg
Enoch	7	Reu
Methuselah	8	Serug
Lamech	9	Nahor
Noah	10	Terah

This further solidifies the biblical notion of Noah as a 'second Adam' in whom the human race, as well as Creation in general, undergoes a 'second start.' One hermeneutical note should be mentioned in connection with this comparison of the overall genealogy, and that is the insertion of 'Cainan' into the

fourth generation by the gospel writer Luke, in Luke Chapter 3. Not only does this interrupt the parallelism between Genesis 5 and 11, it is an insertion that is not to be found in the rest of the Hebrew Old Testament. It appears to have come to Luke from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament Scriptures, where we find Cainan in verse 12 of Chapter 11. It must be noted that the fourth generation of the Sethites from Adam also contains *Kenan*, a very similar name to the *Cainan* of Luke's genealogy from Shem. It appears that the insertion is a copyist's error, as it is absent from the same genealogy recorded in I Chronicles 1. Leaving Cainan out of the link preserves the ten generational structure of the two 'godly' lines, the descendants of Adam through Seth, and those of Noah through Shem.

<u>Luke 3:34-38</u>		<u>Genesis 11:10f</u>		<u>I Chron. 1:24-26</u>
Noah	1	Noah	1	Noah
Shem	2	Shem	2	Shem
Arpachshad	3	Arpachshad	3	Arpachshad
<i>Cainan</i>	4	Shelah	4	Shelah
Shelah	5	Eber	5	Eber
Eber	6	Peleg	6	Peleg
Peleg	7	Reu	7	Reu
Reu	8	Serug	8	Serug
Serug	9	Nahor	9	Nahor
Nahor	10	Terah	10	Terah
Terah	11		11	

Hermeneutical issues aside, the *toledoth* of Shem serves as a good place to pause and take stock of where we have been; to revisit the overarching theme of this particular study: The Rise and Progress of Sin. Beginning with Genesis 3, we have traced the advent and growth of sin through two broadly parallel histories: from the Fall to the Flood, and from the Flood to the Tower of Babel. In the 'progressive parallelism' that is common to Scripture, we find that whereas the first of these histories ends cataclysmically, the second continues on, with the lineage of Shem, and anticipates a new chapter of God's unfolding redemptive

plan through the call of Abram. There is universal agreement that Chapter 12 begins a ‘new’ unveiling of God’s redemptive plan, focusing on the person of Abraham and the nation of his direct descendants through Isaac and Jacob. The other nations of the world fade into the background, and come into the narrative only inasmuch as they touch the lives of these three covenantal patriarchs. Thus the *toledoth* of Shem is indeed the last ‘chapter’ of the current narrative, which began with the Fall of Man in Chapter 3, which itself is a parallel to the Call of Abram beginning Chapter 12.<sup>316</sup>

We begin this assessment of the path traveled by reminding ourselves of the significance of the *toledoths* – ‘the records of the generations of...’ – of which there are ten in the Book of Genesis. The *toledoth* of Shem is exactly half the distance from the start to the finish:

2:4	<i>Toledoth</i> of the heavens and the earth	11:27	<i>Toledoth</i> of Terah
5:1	<i>Toledoth</i> of Adam	25:12	<i>Toledoth</i> of Ishmael
6:9	<i>Toledoth</i> of Noah	25:19	<i>Toledoth</i> of Isaac
10:1	<i>Toledoth</i> of the sons of Noah	36:1	<i>Toledoth</i> of Esau
11:10	<i>Toledoth</i> of Shem	37:2	<i>Toledoth</i> of Jacob

The structure of the Book of Genesis, built around these ten *toledoth* sections, gives every indication both of a single author and of a stylistic intent. In modern terms, we might well consider the *toledoth* headings as the overall outline points – the Roman numeral headings – that form the basic framework to the entire book. So far from being editorial additions from a later date – the popular theory of the documentary hypothesis camp – these *toledoth* headings furnish the thematic divisions woven into the Book of Genesis from its inception. We are reminded of Martin Woudstra’s comment from an earlier chapter, “The *toledoth*

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<sup>316</sup> For the purposes of this and, Lord willing, the next installment of the Genesis series, Chapter 12 will be taken as beginning in 11:27, which commences the *toledoth* of Terah.

formulas have not been subsequently added to an already existing text, but are the very fabric around which the whole of Genesis has been constructed."<sup>317</sup>

But the *toledoth* formulas are not the entirety of the structure of Genesis. They constitute the main headings, and as such they guide us in our study of the Book of Genesis from an exegetical standpoint. Some are major divisions, others are minor. No one would attempt to place on par the *toledoth* of Ishmael with that of Isaac, or the *toledoth* of Esau with the *toledoth* of Jacob. The two longest sections are the *toledoth* of Terah, in which Abraham is the central character, and that of Jacob. And this makes sense to the reader, especially in light of the subsequent flow of redemptive history in the Old Testament. If we therefore 'prioritize' these sections, according to their content, theme, and the amount of text given to each, our 'outline' might look something like this:

- <sup>1</sup>*Toledoth* of the heavens and the earth
  - <sup>2</sup>*Toledoth* of Adam
  - <sup>3</sup>*Toledoth* of Noah
    - <sup>4</sup>*Toledoth* of the sons of Noah
      - <sup>5</sup>*Toledoth* of Shem
  - <sup>6</sup>*Toledoth* of Terah
    - <sup>7</sup>*Toledoth* of Ishmael
      - <sup>8</sup>*Toledoth* of Isaac
      - <sup>9</sup>*Toledoth* of Esau
    - <sup>10</sup>*Toledoth* of Jacob

This arrangement highlights three of the *toledoth* sections as of primary importance organizationally, with the other sections subsumed under them. But within each section there is also to be found literary structure - certainly one would not expect to find a framework governing the overall book, and no form or organization within the individual *toledoth* sections. Thus we take this opportunity to review the structure of the first major *toledoth* heading, and in

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<sup>317</sup> Woudstra, "The Toledoth of Genesis," 188-189.

particular the section that formed the focus of this study, *The Rise & Progress of Sin*.

Consistently as we have progressed through the narrative of Genesis from Chapter 3 to Chapter 11, we have ‘heard’ echoes of earlier themes in later passages. For instance, the curse upon the land in Genesis 3 is ‘reversed’ in Genesis 9.

Genesis 3:17-18

***Cursed is the ground** because of you;  
In toil you will eat of it  
All the days of your life. Both thorns and  
thistles it shall grow for you;  
And you will eat the plants of the field*

Genesis 8:21

*The LORD smelled the soothing aroma; and the  
LORD said to Himself, “I will never again  
**curse the ground** on account of man, for the  
intent of man’s heart is evil from his youth;  
and I will never again destroy every living  
thing, as I have done.”*

The ‘reversing’ of the curse makes clear that the reason has nothing to do with any reclamation in the heart of man, whose “*thoughts and intentions of his heart are only evil always.*” Indeed, man still toils for his bread, and frustration and failure still characterize all human endeavors. So the echo of Genesis 3:17 in Genesis 8:21 causes the reader to pause and consider in what manner God has ‘reversed’ the curse upon the ground. The tentative conclusion of this study was that the pronouncement of Genesis 8 is the commencement of Common Grace upon the earth, in that we find the usual metaphors of such universally-applied divine grace in the mention of the seasons and of ‘seedtime and harvest’ in Genesis 8:22,

*While the earth remains,  
Seedtime and harvest,  
And cold and heat,  
And summer and winter,  
And day and night  
Shall not cease.*

(Genesis 8L22)



The point of this summary, however, is not to reiterate the exegetical conclusions arrived at in earlier sections, but rather to remind the reader to 'listen for the echoes' not only in the *toledoths* of Genesis, but indeed throughout the Scriptures. The language of early revelation becomes the memory of later revelation, the words of the former becomes the terminology of the latter. But the meaning is not merely a repetition, as this example of the curse upon the ground illustrates; there is *progression* in revelation, with each stage enlarging upon the vocabulary and redemptive-historical heritage of future revelation. Thus the student of Scripture learns to tune his or her ears to hear the echoes, and to *listen* to them, and to meditate on the significance of the echo in the language of the immediate context.

Setting the parallels aside one another confirms the general conclusion that Noah was indeed a 'second Adam.' Immediately after the Fall of Adam we have the narrative of Cain and Abel; immediately after Noah's departure from the ark, we have the narrative of Ham's sin, involving his brothers Shem and Japheth. What is the theological purpose of these two, parallel stories? There are several points that can be gleaned without having to do much exegetical work. First, there is the generational transmission of sin. In the first narrative we find that even though it was Adam who sinned first, Cain and Abel were both sinners by birth. In the second narrative we find that the Flood - catastrophic and comprehensive as it was - nonetheless did not eradicate sin from the human heart.

A second point that can be made from these two stories is the negative impact of sin within the closest of human institutions, the family. We might say that there is a bad apple in every bushel; with two sons, one will go bad; with three, only one will be 'good.' That is not, of course, a universal rule that applies to each and every family, but these examples are perhaps given to us to illustrate that sin is not an environmental issue; it does not arise from faulty upbringing or 'missed opportunities.' Sin is now systemic within human nature, and passes

from generation to generation by normal procreation. This is not to say that Abel and Shem were not sinners; they most certainly were, and Scripture elevates no man (other than Jesus Christ) to the level of naturally sinless. It is simply to say that the paths taken by sons are determined – though not fatalistically – by either nature or grace. And that leads to a third theological principle that flows from the ‘brothers’ narratives: *divine election*.

Within the text of Genesis 4 and Genesis 9, there is no indication that anything inherent within Cain or Abel on the one hand, or Ham, Shem, or Japheth on the other, can be seen as the *cause* of their different life trajectories. We are not told that Abel was a naturally good and godly man, nor are we told the like concerning Shem. We are not told that Cain had been a difficult child for Adam and Eve, nor that Ham was particularly troublesome for Noah and his wife. The division in these two narratives, as with the division throughout divine revelation, cuts where it does in accordance with the will of God alone. The first narrative presents us with the *direct* consideration of God, who looked upon Abel’s sacrifice with favor, but did not do so with Cain’s. The second narrative presents the same differentiation among the brothers, only this time it is *indirectly* administered through the curse/blessing of Noah over his three sons. Clearly Noah is set forth here in the prophetic ministry, something we will find given to the patriarchal fathers in reference to the place and purpose of their sons vis-à-vis God’s redemptive plan. With regard to the Cain/Abel and the Ham/Shem/Japheth narratives, the pronouncement of curse/blessing by Noah upon his sons is of the same order as the direct assessment by God of the offerings of Cain and of Abel.

Another obvious parallel to be found in this section of Genesis is the mention of two worldly men *par excellence* in the lineage of Adam/Cain and of Noah/Ham. These two are Lamech and Nimrod. From a literary standpoint the short semi-biographical sketches of these two worldly men – each sitting awkwardly in the midst of a greater genealogical section – forces the reader to

consider their parallel nature, even though the content of each is dissimilar. Both men are violent creatures – one a braggart over his ability (and perhaps history) to exact disproportionate punishment from other men for offenses committed against him, real or perceived. The second man has nothing to say directly, but what is said of him is of the same violent strain as the Sword Song of Lamech: *Nimrod was a mighty hunter before the Lord*. In each narrative much is left to the reader's imagination. But in neither case is it hard to see these men as representatives in their respective generations of self-made and oppressive men.

In this instance we see an excellent example of the 'progressive' nature of biblical parallelism. Lamech was a violent man who took out his anger upon other individual men. We do not, however, see Lamech institutionalizing his power and his anger within the formation of an overarching social structure; a kingdom. On the contrary, Nimrod is a more calculated man – perhaps never having committed a murder in cold blood or heat of passion, like his spiritual prototype, Lamech. But neither is Nimrod satisfied with merely avenging himself against his neighbor; for Nimrod only vast regional domination would suffice. Sin manifested in the earlier example in the form of a homicidal individual progresses to the intercultural hegemonic stage in the later example. Picking a fight with one's next door neighbor morphs into a land grab for the neighboring country. Human violence goes global in Nimrod without losing any of its local features in revenge and murder.

A significant feature of this section of Genesis – from Chapter 3 through most of Chapter 11 – is the minor role played by the 'righteous' line. To be sure, Noah has a leading part in the narrative. But from a developmental perspective, the children of Seth and the children of Shem play hardly a part at all. The beginnings of industry and culture – metalworking and music and art – as well as the building of cities and empires, are all functions of the 'non' covenantal line that runs from Adam through Cain, and from Noah through Ham. These are the worldlings, and this is their biblical story, their meta-narrative. This is the reason

so much of what we read in these chapters of Genesis reads like the daily news reports in the paper or online. The patterns of worldlings are repetitive, their goals uniform, their methods predictable. This reality leads us to what is perhaps the most pronounced and significant parallel set in this entire section: The Garden of Eden and the Tree, on the one hand, and the City and its Tower, on the other.

These two motifs are profoundly similar, parallels but with significant differences. The Garden and the Tree were placed on earth by God, whereas the City and its Tower were the product of the art and ingenuity of Man. That is the *progressive* part of the parallelism. Otherwise the two entities present thought frameworks that each and together captivate the underlying intellectual motive force of mankind throughout history. In the first instance, the operative phrase is uttered by Satan (and clearly approved by Adam, as the sequel proves): "*you will be as God, to know good and evil.*" The corresponding phrase in the later narrative comes from the collective mouth of Man, already fallen and no longer in need of any to tempt him: "*let us make for ourselves a name...*" In the first instance Man is already in a central, secure place with all of the peace and community he could possibly want, coupled with the beneficent presence of God; in the latter he comes together to build the City in search of peace and security, yet in fear of God scattering him "*abroad over the face of the whole earth.*" As Augustine elaborated with so many words in his *City of God*, this has forever been the tendency of Man, the worldling whose only home and hope is this earth.

Leon Kass devotes a large portion of his commentary on this section of Scripture - Genesis 11:1-9 - to the failings of the 'City of Man,' or man's perpetual Babel, as Kass himself views it. The effort is doomed to perpetual failure, just as its attempt is inevitable in every generation. A fundamental problem, as Kass (and the Bible) see it, is that the Babels of the Worldlings are uniquely man-centered: they create artificial cultures divorced from the Creator of all things, and thus sow the seeds of their own destruction in the unreality

they seek to create. The City of Man creates a microcosm of humanity in which unity of thought leads to emptiness of thought, and man himself is rendered incapable of recognizing the farce he has created. Kass writes,

Finally, and perhaps the worst failing of all, there is no possibility in such a city of discovering all of the other failings. The much-prized fact of unity, embodied especially in a unique but created 'truth' believed by all, precludes the possibility of discovering that one might be in error. The one uncontested way does not even admit of the distinction between truth and error. Self-examination, no less than self-criticism, would be impossible...With everyone given over to the one common way, there would be mass identity and mass consciousness but no private identity or true self-consciousness; there would be shoulder-to-shoulder but no real face-to-face. Unity and homogeneity in self-creation are compatible with material prosperity, but they are a prescription for mindless alienation from the world, from one's fellows, and from one's own soul.<sup>318</sup>

The stories of the City of Man in its countless manifestations throughout history, are fascinating to read – indeed, they form the material of history. But the believer is constantly struck by their grandiose dreams, and their utter failures. The innumerable 'Nimrods' of mankind's history – the Charlemagnes, the Tammerlanes, the Plantagenet, the Napoleons and Hitlers – are but the supreme examples of the attempt of the worldling at all levels to build for himself a city, and to make for himself a name. Kass, who pedigree as an evangelical is quite suspect, nonetheless recognizes that Man's constant attempt at building Babels presents a perennial challenge to those who seek to grasp and live by the wisdom of God. The Scripture sets out the timeless pattern of human sin in both its individual and its social developmental patterns, and the believer continues to hear the echoes of Genesis 3 – 11 in the events of the world today.

Is there a better way? A more blessed, secure, and peaceful way? Kass answers the question as he turns his thoughts to the next *toledoth*: "We are ready to take a walk with Abram."<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> Kass; 235

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*; 243.